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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1965 Vol. 16, No. 5

NEW COMPLETE NOVELET

THE HICK FUZZ

by ED LACY

Police Chief Bordon had a harsh way of enforcing the letter of the law. But a harsh man can sometimes strike a hard blow at cruelty and injustice.

. . . . . 30 to 59

NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

THE MOGHUL BOX
BRETT HALLIDAY 2

NEW EXCITING NOVELET

BY HIS HAND
MAX VAN DERVEER 98

SHORT STORIES

HAMILTON'S END
LAWRENCE VAN GELDER 23

TELETYPE
WILL F. JENKINS 60

TEN MINUTES TO DEATH
PETER OPPENHEIM 73

MR. POLICEMAN
JACK RITCHIE 80

WAIT FOR TROUBLE
NORMAN HUNT 90

THE WIG
DOROTHY MADLEE 129

AND MURDER MAKES FIVE
MORRIS HERSHMAN 137

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THE MOGHUL

A NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The case was tied in with a fortune in precious stones . . . So Shayne took unusual precautions, right from the start. But a killer in hiding can make worries pile up.

MIKE SHAYNE entered the offices of Johnson, Maxwell and Bleeker at exactly 1:30 P.M. that day. The gaunt, red-headed detective leaned his big frame down toward the pretty girl receptionist. The dark-haired girl reminded Shayne of his own secretary, Lucy Hamilton.

Shayne smiled at her. "Johnson wanted to see me, angel," the detective said. "The name is Shayne."

"I'll tell Mr. Johnson you're here, Mr. Shayne," the girl said. She clicked on the intercom.

Mathew Johnson did not keep Shayne waiting. The dapper, impeccably dressed lawyer came to the door of his private office and motioned Shayne to come in. Johnson was a dark-haired man of average height. Shayne had met him a few times, and did not particularly like him. Rumor had it that Johnson was something of a

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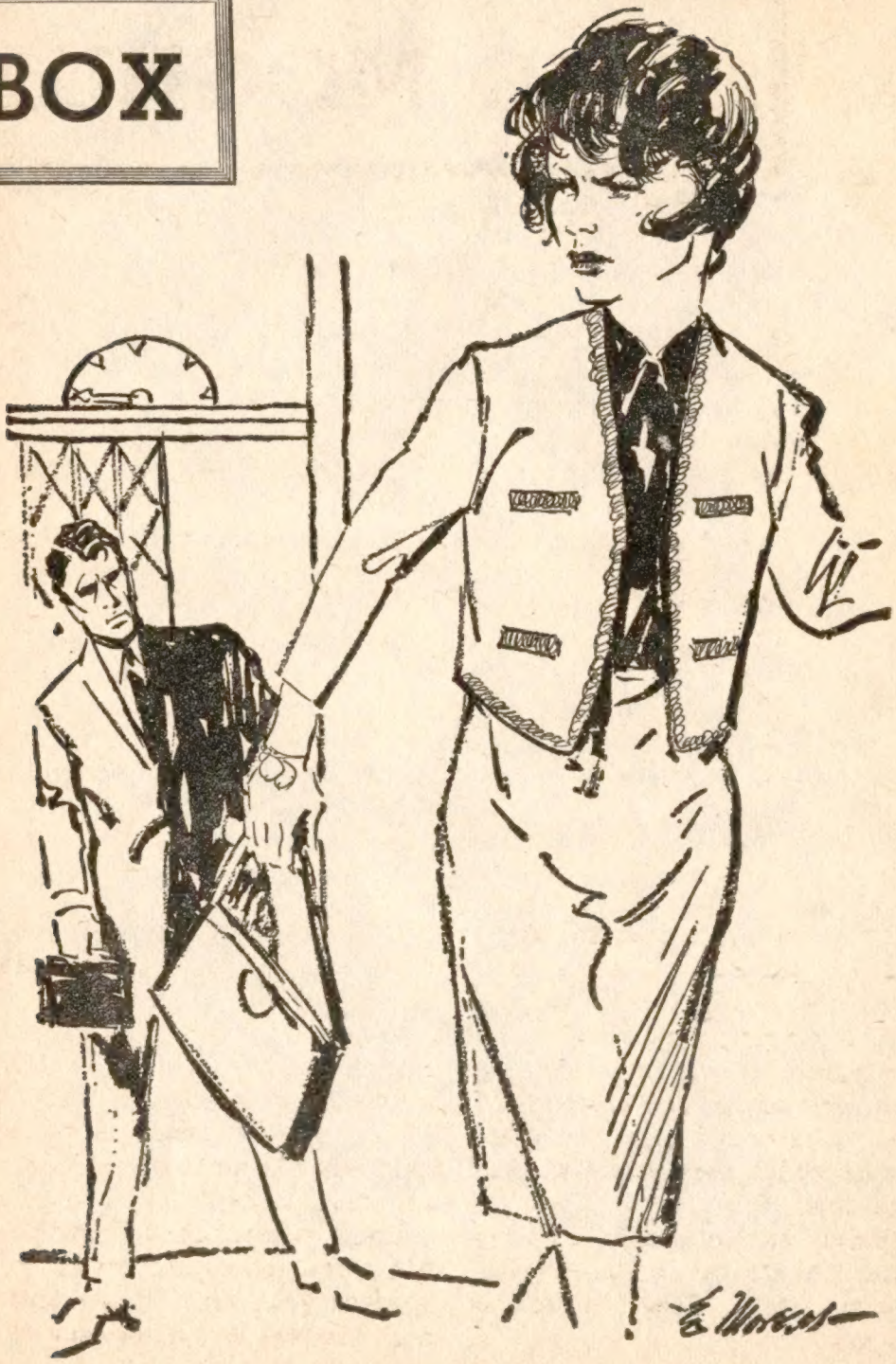
BOX



playboy, but he was also a first-rate lawyer.

Shayne followed Johnson into the plush private office. They were not alone as Johnson closed the door behind him. Two other well-dressed men and a tall woman were seated in chairs around a desk as big as a football field. Shayne was pretty sure that the tall woman had once been a striking beauty. She was not bad to look at even now, and she was obviously well past her first youth. Her blonde hair was bleached, and her slender body was girdled tightly. But she still retained a great deal of what she had started out with.

Johnson sat behind the giant desk and motioned to the other people. "You know my partners, Shayne. Paul Maxwell and Sam Bleeker."

Shayne nodded to the men. Maxwell was a tall, skinny cadaver built a lot like Shayne's friend Tim Rourke. Bleeker was short and fat. The two lawyers nodded in return. Shayne looked at the woman.

"Mrs. Fairbarn is one of our clients," Johnson said, nodding toward the blonde woman. "That's why you're here. Sit down, Shayne."

Shayne folded his gaunt frame into a leather chair that might well have cost the month's wages of an honest working man. He noticed that Mrs. Fairbarn appeared to be extremely nervous. Maxwell and Bleeker did not seem much calmer. Only Johnson looked composed and spoke with an air of assurance.

"As I said, Mrs. Fairbarn is a client of ours, one of our oldest and—"

You have to say things like, that don't you Matt?" Mrs. Fairbarn snapped.

"Sorry, my dear, oldest only in point of our service to you," Johnson said smoothly.

"Get to the point, Matt," Paul Maxwell said. "I've got other business today, and so do you."

"Of course, Paul," Johnson said. "Well, Shayne, we want you to convoy a rather valuable object to New York. It's an ancient Hindu box, studded with rubies, sapphires, and emeralds. It's worth a fortune."

The dapper lawyer's description of the box seemed to anger the tall blonde woman.

"Matt never seems to know the true value of what he has in his hands, Mr. Shayne," she said.

"I'm a lawyer, Emily—not a museum curator," Johnson shot back, his calmness vanishing for an instant.

"You never know the true value of anything, Matt," Emily Fairbarn went on relentlessly. "The box is not Hindu but Moslem, and it isn't terribly ancient. But it *was* the personal property of one of the first Moghuls. The jewels on it are worth a fortune. Matt knows prices, but he doesn't seem to real-

ize that it is actually priceless. I gave it into the keeping of my lawyers here, but now I've decided to lend it to a New York Museum."

Mathew Johnson looked worried behind his giant desk. "We tried to talk her out of it, of course," he explained. "But when Emily gets an idea—well, that's it."

"It's not insured," Paul Maxwell said, "since the value of the jewels is a great deal less than its historical value. The premiums are ridiculous on items as unique as this."

"Personally," Sam Bleeker said, "I'll be relieved when it's out of our hands. Fifteen years ago Emily kept it in her house and people tried to steal it on three different occasions. That was when she entrusted it to us for safe keeping. I've been worried about it almost every night since."

Johnson was drumming his well-manicured fingers on the desk-top, an impatient look on his face.

"It's been safe in our vault," Johnson said. "But thieves seem to sense when something that valuable is out in the open. When Emily suggested some sort of guard, I thought of you, Shayne. We'll all be in New York to handle the presentation, but we want you to take charge of the box."

"Why would thieves want it?" Shayne said. "If it's as unique as you say they'd have great difficulty in disposing of it."

"The jewels are far less unique,"

Johnson said. "If they were taken off the box no one could identify them, Shayne."

"All right," Shayne nodded. "I'll assume full responsibility for the safe delivery of the box and the jewels. But I'll go to New York alone and take my own precautions. Just tell me where to contact you when I get there. If there are thieves, they'll be following you."

"Fair enough," Johnson said with a smile.

The three lawyers seemed more than relieved. Emily Fairbarn nodded agreement. Mathew Johnson brought the box from the wall safe. It was a magnificent thing—the jewels glowing red and deep blue and dark green in the Miami sunlight which was streaming in through one of the small room's two windows.

Johnson called in his dark-haired secretary. "We'd like to

have you do the packaging right here, Molly," he said.

"I'll get the materials," the girl replied, nodding.

She brought a cardboard box, packing, and sealing wax, and wrapped the jeweled box up carefully. The box went first into a thick chamios bag, then into a heavy plastic bag. The plastic bag was placed in foam packing inside the cardboard box which was securely wrapped and sealed. Then the cardboard box was placed in a small black leather carrying case. Shayne took the case.

"We will all be staying at the Waldorf-Astoria, Shayne," Johnson said, "you can contact us there tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. We will meet at the museum at eleven."

Shayne nodded and stood up.

"Miss Moore will pay you the retainer," Paul Maxwell said.

In the outer office the pretty secretary paid Mike Shayne, and the redhead left carrying the small black bag. As he reached the elevator, he saw a sudden movement at the end of the long corridor. The door to the exit stairs had closed quickly. Someone was watching him.

The red-headed detective moved swiftly to the stairs door and kicked it open, his automatic out and ready. The landing behind the door was empty. Below, he heard the sound of running feet. A loud, sharp clicking of a woman's high heels. He raced down the stairs in pursuit. At each landing he leaned over to look below, but the woman ran out of sight.

At the landing two floors above the ground floor the stairs changed. They no longer wound around, but ran straight down to the exit door. Shayne saw the woman. She was a small, slender and auburn-haired. She glanced behind her once. Shayne saw a thin, pinched face. Then she went out through the door into the lobby of the office building.

Shayne reached the exit door and ran out into the lobby. He raced through the lobby and out into the street. The woman had vanished. On the street no cars were just pulling away from the curb. Shayne turned and ran back into the building, his automatic back in its holster now.

He looked around the lobby, but there was nowhere to hide. Then he walked to the elevators. One car was going up. As he watched it stopped at the seventh floor—the floor of Johnson, Maxwell and Bleeker.

II

MIKE SHAYNE tugged on his earlobe. Had the woman eluded him by going back up on the elevator? If so, why? Was she casing the situation for some gang of jewel thieves? Or was she connected to someone on the seventh floor?

Whatever the truth was, Shayne decided to be very careful and make sure that no one knew how or when he was going to New York, or where he would stay when he got there.

He left the building and drove back to his Flagler Street office. As he strode into the office, Lucy Hamilton smiled up at him from behind her desk in the outer office. His pert, brown-eyed secretary was turning the pages of her notebook.

"You have two appointments for the afternoon, and a man called to—"

"Cancel them, angel," Shayne said abruptly, "and get me reservations on three jets to New York. Use phony names."

"You mean—three separate plane reservations?"

"Right, angel. I'll decide which one to use at the last minute."

He grinned at the puzzled Lucy, and strode on into his private office. He placed the black bag in a drawer of his desk and locked it. Then he went to work to clear up some details of other cases. Lucy had made reservations for 3:00, 4:00 and 6:00.

He left his office in time to make the four o'clock flight. He drove straight to the airport, the black bag in plain sight beside him. He parked his car and strode on into the main building of the airport.

Inside he doubled quickly back and slipped into a taxi, sure he had been neither seen nor followed. He ordered the taxi driver to drive him into Miami. Back in Miami he entered a bar and ordered a sidecar.

"Easy on the Cointreau," he told the bartender.

He had two more sidecars, good ones, and then left the bar. Once more he hailed a taxi, and was driven back to the airport. He made the six o'clock flight just as the ramp was being moved away. On the jet he sat back and grinned If anyone had managed to know which jet he had taken, they were better than magicians.

Shayne remained alert during the entire flight. Nothing happened. There was no one on the jet whom he recognized, and no one who took the slightest interest in him or whose behavior was in any way suspicious. He saw no auburn-haired woman with a thin, pinched face.

By the time the jet reached the holding pattern for Laguardia Airport, the redhead felt relaxed enough to look down at the smoking dumps of New Jersey and the sprawled lights of the great city on the Hudson.

He took a taxi from Laguardia into Manhattan. He had waited until now to consider the hotel angle. Normally he checked in at The Gotham or The Plaza. For that reason he decided to cross them off the list this time. He finally decided on The Hotel Lexington because he had never stayed there

before and because it was close to the Waldorf-Astoria

Most people would have expected him to stay as far from the Waldorf as possible, since the lawyers and Mrs. Fairbarn had engaged rooms there.

He checked into his room, after a careful study of the lobby. He showered and shaved, keeping the small black bag in the bathroom with him, his pistol at hand. He had double-locked the door, and checked all the windows and connecting doors.

After his shower he dressed and went down for dinner. He took the black bag with him. All through dinner he remained alert.

After dinner he stopped in the bar for a brandy. He had two Martels, and then went back up in the elevator. He felt that he had nothing further to worry about, and that all he had to do was get a good night's sleep and deliver the jeweled Moghul box to the Museum in the morning.

As he opened the door to his room and stepped in, he saw too late that the room was dark. He had left a light on. He clawed for his pistol.

The blackjack struck squarely on the back of his skull.

III

THE FIRST THING Mike Shayne saw when he opened his eyes again was Mathew Johnson. The dapper lawyer was seated in an armchair. He seemed to be looking at Shayne in the bright light, a faint smile on his face. But he was not looking at Shayne, and he was not smiling. He was dead.

Shayne blinked in the light and tried to bring his thoughts to a focus His head hurt, and when he touched the back of his skull he flinched with pain. His hand came away wet and bloody. But not as bloody as the front of Mathew Johnson's impeccable white shirt.

The dapper lawyer was no longer dapper. The whole front of his shirt was drenched with blood, and there were dark stains of powder burns where the bullet had entered just above the heart.

Shayne sat there on the floor for a few more long minutes. Finally he felt strong enough to risk standing. He stood up shakily and walked to where the dead man was lying. He bent and felt the body. It was already growing cold.

Shayne examined the body of the dead lawyer carefully. Mathew Johnson had been shot once at close range with what looked like a small caliber pistol. The bullet had not come out the back of the body, and the wound was small. Shayne continued his examination and found three very interesting items.

On Johnson's right cheek there was a faint trace of lipstick.

The dead lawyer was carrying a pistol in his right-hand jacket pock-

et. It had not been fired; the safety catch was still on.

In the left hand pocket Shayne found a peculiar black cloth bag. The cloth was thin, and two round holes had been cut in it

Shayne held the bag up to the light, and looked at it. It was then that he remembered the black case he had been carrying when he walked in. The case was gone. Someone had taken the jeweled box.

Shayne went into the bathroom and washed the back of his head with cold water. When he felt more revived, he walked back into the main room and called the police.

The New York police did not take long to arrive. Shayne had put his call directly through to Homicide, and was pleased to see the detective who walked into the room. It was his old friend Lieutenant Naudes.

The Lieutenant smiled at Shayne. "Another corpse? Do I have to arrest you this time?" Naudes said.

"I don't think so, Naudes," Shayne said.

"You better tell me about it," Lieutenant Naudes said.

Shayne explained all that had happened so far, including his devious ruses to evade any possible pursuit by would-be thieves.

"It looks like you didn't succeed in shaking them," Naudes said.

"Apparently not," Mike Shayne agreed slowly. "Only—"

"Only what, Mike?" Lieutenant Naudes asked.

"I'm not sure. There's something wrong about all this," Shayne said. "Let's see what your people can tell us."

"Right," Naudes said.

THE TWO DETECTIVES sat in the room while the medical examiner and Naude's men did their work. Shayne was thinking about the thin auburn-haired woman he had seen watching Johnson's office, and about his absolute certainty that no one had followed him. Seemingly no one could possibly have known he was in the Hotel Lexington. And yet he had been attacked, Matt Johnson had been killed in his room, and the jeweled box was gone. Somehow a robber and killer had found him, despite all his precautions.

"Here it is, Lieutenant," the

medical examiner said at last. "Shot once, close range, with what seems to have been a twenty-two caliber pistol. Bullet still in wound. Time of death between ten and eleven o'clock tonight."

Shayne looked at his watch. It read 12:30. He had returned to the room at about 10:30. He remembered looking at the clock down in the hotel bar

The rest of Naudes' men reported finding nothing of any interest except the pistol, black cloth bag, and lipstick that Shayne had already found. Naudes held the black cloth bag with the holes in it and knitted his brow as he studied it.

"It has to be a mask," Naudes said. "Pulled over the head with two eye holes cut in it."

"That's what I think," Shayne agreed. "The only question is—did it belong to Johnson, or did the killer leave it in his pocket?"

"Why would Johnson want to steal his own box?" Lieutenant Naudes asked.

"It wasn't his, Naudes. He was just custodian of it. Maybe he wanted it for keeps. That's certainly a possibility."

"All right," Naudes said. "But from what you tell me he's had it in a vault for years. That means there would have been nothing to prevent him stealing it when it could not have been so quickly and easily missed. With you in the picture, everyone in the world would know it had been stolen within twenty-four hours."

Shayne nodded. "You'd think he could have done it better."

"I'm pretty sure the mask belonged to our missing killer and thief. Whoever it was waited here in your room. When you came in with the case he slugged you. Johnson probably wanted to talk to you. That would be natural enough, since he hired you. He came up, probably found the door open, and surprised the thief. The thief had to kill him. Then he took the case and ran."

"Logical," Shayne said, "but—"

Before Shayne could continue with what he had been about to say, a uniformed policeman walked into the room. The patrolman was carrying a small black case. He held it out toward Lieutenant Naudes.

"Is this the missing case, sir?" he asked.

Shayne nodded to Naudes. "That's it."

"I found it on the fire stairs," the patrolman explained. "I was checking the exits for clues, and there it was."

Naudes took the case and placed it on a table. He opened it. Shayne looked inside the case. The wrapped box was still there. Lieutenant Naudes broke the seals and removed the wrapping. He opened the chamios bag. The box was there, exactly as Shayne had seen it when Mathew Johnson had or-

dered his pretty secretary to pack it.

"Something must have scared our thief, he panicked and dropped it on the stairs," Naudes said.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe His grey eyes had narrowed to hard points like steel.

"After slugging me, killing Johnson, and getting away clean, he dropped the loot on the stairs at the first hint of trouble?" Shayne said. "It stinks, Naudes. The killer even turned on the lights in this room, probably to make sure he had the right case. By the time he reached the stairs he should have been pretty safe."

"Can you think of another explanation?" Naudes said.

"Not yet," Shayne said, "but I can think of another question. You said it looks like Johnson came to see me and surprised our thief, right? The thief had left the door open very conveniently and carelessly?"

"It looks that way," Naudes conceded. "What's wrong with it?"

"Only that Johnson didn't know I was here either," Shayne said softly. "Or at least he wasn't supposed to."

Naudes said nothing for a moment. Shayne was looking at the body of the dead lawyer, and at the mask in Naudes' hand, and the carrying case so carelessly dropped.

"Naudes, I'm absolutely sure no one could have followed me to this room," he said. "I'm sure no one did follow me. Then how did Johnson get to my room and end up murdered?

IV

A GREY NEW YORK dawn was streaking the sky outside the window of Lieutenant Naudes' office at Homicide Headquarters. Shayne had been dozing in a chair. He was waiting for two things: the answer to a call he had put through to his reporter friend Tim Rourke in Miami; and the results of Naudes' putting his men to work on the black case and the Moghul box.

Shayne jerked awake, his head throbbing again where he had been sapped. Lieutenant Naudes was standing in the dim room, the single light on Naudes' desk casting a feeble circle of light against the grey dawn beyond the window.

Naudes held a tiny object that looked like a large postage stamp. "I think I can answer your question about how Johnson got to your room," he said.

The Lieutenant sat down behind his desk and tossed the small, thin object toward Shayne The redhead picked it up. He knew at once what it was.

"A *homer*," Shayne said softly. "Where was it?"

"In the bottom of the black case they gave you to carry. It was hidden under the leather inner lining. My lab tells me it sends out signals for about a mile."

Shayne held the small object. A *homer*. A tiny radio signal transmitter no bigger than a large postage stamp. Anyone with the proper receiver could locate the *homer*, and whoever carried it, from a distance of one mile, and despite the intervening traffic.

"Nobody had to follow you from Miami," Naudes said wearily "They just had to pick you up here at Laguardia. They could stay a mile away and out of your sight, and still follow you right to this hotel. In the hotel it would be child's play to locate your room. So we know how the robbers found you. The question is—who put the *homer* in that bag?"

Shayne rubbed his gaunt face. A *homer* hidden in the black carrying bag. It could not have been placed in the bag *after* he had carried it from the offices of Johnson, Maxwell and Bleeker.

"It had to be in the bag when I got it," Shayne said carefully. "That means one of the three lawyers, Mrs. Emily Fairbarn, or—or anyone who could have had access to the bag in the office. I suppose almost anyone could have sneaked into the office earlier Only it would have to have been someone who knew the jeweled box was going on a trip in that bag."

Shayne was thinking about the auburn-haired woman with the pinched face he had seen lurking outside the offices of Johnson, Maxwell and Bleeker. Lieutenant Naudes had something else in mind.

"What about that pretty secretary, Molly Moore?" Naudes said.

"What about her?" Shayne said.

"She packed it," Naudes said. "And she's here in New York."

"Here?" Shayne said, startled.

Naudes nodded. "We ran a check on all those in the affair—matter of routine. They're all here. We found that the girl left Miami earlier than you did, alone, and checked into a hotel. Guess what hotel?"

"What hotel? Not that I can't guess," Shayne said grimly.

"Yeh," Naudes said, "the Hotel Lexington!"

Shayne thought about the girl, Molly Moore. She had packed the jeweled box, she had handled the black carrying case. She had known where the box was going. It would have been simple for her to slip the *homer* into the case to lead her confederates to Shayne in New York. And she was checked into the same hotel.

"Have you arrested her?" Shayne said.

"Not yet, but we're watching her," Naudes said. "We don't have much real evidence so far."

Shayne nodded. "Besides, it was Johnson who came to my room. It was Johnson who had a gun and that mask in his pocket."

"But it was Johnson who was killed," Naudes said grimly. "The way I see it, Johnson followed the

killer-thief to your room by accident. He was following the killer for some reason, and didn't know he was going to your room. That would fit with the Moore girl, Shayne. I hear Johnson was quite a man with the ladies."

Shayne frowned. Naudes' explanation had a certain amount of logic, but there was too much coincidence. Or was there? Why not a simple matter of someone close to Johnson cooking up a robbery plot, and Johnson following the person by sheer accident last night? After all, it *had* to be someone close to the lawyer's office to plant that *homer* in the first place. The thief had to know what Shayne was carrying in the first place, too.

He was still thinking about the Moore girl, and Johnson, when his call from Tim Rourke came through. The Miami reporter's voice sounded tired.

"You didn't give me much time or much chance, Mike," Tim said at the other end of the line. "I couldn't do much checking outside the newspaper files. But I've got a little."

"Give it to me, Tim," Shayne said into the telephone as Naudes half watched him and half studied the thin sun that was rising over the rooftops of the great city.

"Well, about the business of Johnson, Maxwell and Bleeker," Rourke's voice said. "They're sound as about a million dollars. Rich and solvent. From our financial records they don't keep a lot of ready cash around, but they do a good business. They've handled some shady deals in the past, but not recently."

"What kind of shady deals?" Shayne asked.

"The usual—some questionable real estate deals, a suspicion or two of perjured witnesses, quite a few close-to-the-legal-line contracts. There was a rumor of some heavy bribery to get out of a state investigation about ten years ago, but no proof. Nothing unusual showed in their cash outlays at the time."

"Anything else?" Shayne asked.

"Not in our morgue," Rourke's distant voice said wearily. "I can check better once the offices open down here."

"Okay," Shayne said. "Now what about Mathew Johnson?"

"Nothing you don't know. Clean record, good lawyer—a clothes bug, and a ladies' man. His name gets in the gossip columns a lot, but it's hard to say if there is much to it. His wife throws a public scene every couple of years when she catches him with a doll. Rumor has it he's had a steady affair with that Emily Fairbarn, one of his rich clients. Supposedly it's been going on for years, but he was a lot more discreet about it if it's true."

"That's all, Tim?"

"That's it," the distant voice of the Miami reporter said. "Can I get some sleep now, or do you want more?"

"Get some sleep. If I need more, I'll call you again," Shayne said.

He hung up and began to pull on his earlobe. There was something wrong, something missing in the case. An affair with Emily Fairbarn. Shayne remembered the

way the tall blonde woman had acted in the office of Johnson, Maxwell and Bleeker. She had seemed more than a client. But then—she had known the three lawyers for nearly twenty years.

And why would she steal her own jeweled box? Somehow, the theft and the murder did not quite work together. Yet it had to be an attempted theft of the box, or why the *homer*, and why did it all happen in his hotel room? Shayne turned in his chair to look at Lieutenant Naudes.

"Maybe you better pick up the Moore girl and get her story," he said. "She could be here legitimately. After all, she is the firm's secretary."

"In a separate hotel?" Naudes said. "It sounds fishy."

"If Johnson brought her up here for himself we better find out. Maybe it was one of the other partners! That would fit better. Or maybe she's on her own. There's too much we don't know, Naudes."

"True," the Lieutenant conceded. "But we do know one more thing."

"What's that?" Shayne asked.

"We had that Moghul box examined, Shayne. Routine again." Naudes hesitated and looked out the window into the distance where the sun was up now. "It's fake, Shayne."

Shayne jerked upright in his chair. "Fake?"

"Yeh," Naudes nodded. "Not the box itself. Our expert says that looks real enough. It's the stones, the jewels. They're all fake—just cheap paste. Not worth a hundred dollars."

Shayne jumped up from his seat. He began to pace. Then he turned to stare at Lieutenant Naudes.

"That's it, Naudes! That was what was missing! Give me a couple of hours to ask some more questions, okay?"

"As long as you need," Naudes said, "as long as you tell me the answers when you get them, Mike."

"I'll shout them," Shayne said grimly.

He turned on his heel and strode from the dim morning office. Behind him Naudes switched off his light and leaned back in his chair to stare up into space.

Shayne strode down the halls and corridors and out of the building. He hailed a taxi, and told the driver his destination.

"Waldorf-Astoria, and make it quick," Shayne snapped.

The taxi driver flipped his meter, and the cab was soon on its way uptown along the half-empty early morning avenues of New York City. By the time they reached Grand Central, the sleepy workers were pouring up from the subways and the new day had begun.

V

PAUL MAXWELL and Sam Bleeker were not pleased to see Mike Shayne. The two men were sharing a suite—a suite that had also been the temporary abode of the late Mathew Johnson. They were dressed, and their eyes were sleepless. Naudes men had been talking to them for half the night.

"What do you want, Shayne?" Maxwell asked. "We've got a million details with Matt dead, that damned box in police hands, and the Museum howling. We've got to rearrange the whole affair now."

"Not to mention our business with poor Matt killed," Sam Bleeker said.

"You're sure one of you didn't kill *poor* Matt?" Shayne said bluntly.

"Us?" Sam Bleeker cried.

"You get the hell out of here, Shayne!" Paul Maxwell shouted. "You bungled the job all down the line."

"I don't think we should pay you," Sam Bleeker said.

Shayne's eyes were hard and like steel. He grinned a sudden, wolfish grin at the two lawyers. But his grey eyes were not grinning.

"You'll pay," Shayne said, "but maybe not me."

"What the devil does that mean?" Maxwell snapped.

"It means I know," Shayne said. "I know that the jewels on that box are fake. I know about the whole plan you three cooked up."

The two lawyers turned pale in unison. They both sat down hard and looked at Mike Shayne.

"The jewels are fake, and we found the *homer* you people planted in that carrying bag so you could trace me. You knew I would insist on coming to New York alone and my own way. Any decent detective would have insisted on that. Crowds attract attention, and a potential thief would know you boys were supposed to have

the box. You had it all arranged so that when the box was stolen, you three would look clean as new snow."

The two lawyers said nothing. They sat there on the hotel couch side by side like tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee. They were lawyers, and they were thinking very hard now. Shayne gave them no time to think of a good way out.

"I figure it was Johnson's own idea," Shayne said. "He was the bright and tricky one. The box would be stolen, and you boys would look real innocent. You didn't even know where I was. That would be the way it would look and the cops would run in circles searching for a non-existent thief. They would wait for the jewels to turn up on the criminal market, but they never would. And Mrs. Emily Fairbarn would never know that her priceless box had been looted ten years ago!"

The two lawyers seemed to shrink and blend into the elegant Waldorf couch. Maxwell said nothing. But it was all too much for Sam Bleeker.

"We had to cover!" Bleeker cried. "She was going to give the damned box to that Museum. The Museum people would have spotted the fake right away! We—"

"Shut up, Sam!" Maxwell roared. "He can't prove—"

Sam Bleeker jumped up. The small, fat lawyer was white with fear.

"No, don't you see, he'll try to say we killed Matt! All right, we planned the robbery, but we didn't kill Matt!" Bleeker cried. The fat lawyer was almost eager to explain. "The jewels were fake, see? Then Emily insisted on giving the box to this Museum. We couldn't get the real jewels back, and we couldn't duplicate them. So Matt got the idea of staging a robbery just like you said."

"You stole the jewels ten years ago to bribe some state officials?" Shayne said.

Paul Maxwell nodded now. The tall lawyer had given up, too. He sat on the couch with all the fight gone out of him. He looked up at Mike Shayne and shrugged.

"We didn't have the cash then, and we couldn't sell all we would have had to or the bribe would have been obvious," Maxwell said in a dull voice. "So we stole the jewels from that box. Matt and Emily were lovers, you see? He had no trouble keeping her from taking the box back, or showing it. She did what he told her to do, always.

"We got the cash to make the bribe. We were confident no one could trace the money, and no one would know about the jewels. Then just two weeks ago Emily got the idea of handing the box over to the Museum up here. I'm damned if I know why. Matt decided we had to fake a robbery, so he planted that *homer* on you, and went to

steal it. That's the last we saw of him, I swear it. Damn that Emily. All these years she did everything Matt told her!"

The voice was low and bitter. It came from behind Shayne. It was a woman's voice.

"Everything Emily told him, and nothing I told him, that was Matt," the woman said.

Shayne had whirled to face the woman. It was the small, thin, auburn-haired woman he had seen lurking on the stairway outside the Miami offices of Johnson, Maxwell and Bleeker. She had been crying, but her face was hard and cold now. She looked steadily at Shayne.

"Yes, I was watching Matt's office, Mr. Shayne. Why not ? He had all those women. I got tired of all those women from time to time," the thin woman said.

"You're Mrs. Johnson?" Shayne said.

The woman nodded. "Alice Johnson. Married twenty-two years. First there was Emily Fairbarn, but I was younger then and I never really guessed until years later. It had been going on too long when I found out. I could do nothing. He would have left me. But the others, the little army of cheap tramps, those I wouldn't accept! And Molly Moore was the latest!"

Paul Maxwell had stood and gone to the woman. He put his long arm around her thin shoulders to comfort her. The tall lawyer glared angrily at Mike Shayne. Sam Bleeker still looked pale and scared. The fat lawyer had nothing on his mind but his own troubles. Maxwell was made of harder material.

"Leave Alice alone, Shayne!" Maxwell snapped.

Shayne ignored him. He fixed his hard grey eyes on the thin face of Alice Johnson.

"You were watching the office to catch your husband with Molly Moore?" Shayne asked. "At two o'clock in the afternoon?"

"Not to catch him that time," Alice Johnson said. "I knew we were all going to New York. I wanted to see if Molly was going,

too. I wanted to see what time she left the office. I was going to follow her. But you saw me, so I ran off."

"And went back up to the office on the elevator," Shayne said. "Tell me, did you follow her later?"

"No, I didn't," Mrs. Johnson said.

"Then you didn't know she was here?"

She shook her head.

Shayne watched her closely. He could not tell whether she was lying or not. He also watched Maxwell. The tall lawyer obviously was carrying a torch for his partner's widow. Shayne narrowed his grey eyes as he realized this. But at the moment he had another question on his mind.

"Did you know that the jeweled box was a fake, Mrs. Johnson?"

The woman blinked. "The box? A fake? No, I never thought about it? What would I know about that box? Is it of any importance, Mr. Shayne? Matt is dead!"

Shayne was frowning heavily now. Again she could be lying, but he did not think so. He turned to Maxwell.

"What about the Moore girl and Mrs. Fairbarn, Maxwell. Did either of them know the jewels were paste?"

"No one knew, Shayne, unless one of us told them," Maxwell said. "It wasn't exactly something we would broadcast."

"No, it wouldn't be," Shayne said thoughtfully.

"Anyway, what does it matter?" Maxwell said. "We planned a fake robbery, but someone planned a real one and killed Matt!"

"Maybe," Shayne said. "Right now, I think you had all better come down to Homicide. I think Lieutenant Naudes will want to question you about all of it. Where is your telephone?"

Maxwell indicated the telephone. Shayne went to call Naudes. The Lieutenant listened to Shayne tell about the robbery plot, and the appearance of Alice Johnson.

"I think you better get the Moore girl and Mrs. Fairbarn down to Homicide too," Shayne said.

"Okay," Naudes said from the other end, "but what does the fact that the jewels are worthless have to do with this? A thief would be very unlikely to know real gems from false."

"Everything and nothing," Shayne said into the telephone. "The fake box has just about everything and nothing to do with the murder."

VI

THE INTERROGATION Room at Homicide in New York Police Headquarters was large and dim, illuminated by a single electric bulb suspended from the ceiling. Maxwell stood beside the chair in

which Alice Johnson was sitting. Sam Bleeker was leaning forward in his chair talking earnestly to Emily Fairbarn who looked extremely ill at ease.

Alone in a chair apart from the others, Johnson's pretty secretary, Molly Moore, sat looking frightened and abandoned. Shayne and Naudes were talking to the medical examiner who had not changed his findings in the final autopsy.

"One shot, close range," he said. "A twenty-two caliber pistol, right in the heart."

"And from the blood on the floor, it looks like he was shot and then placed in the chair, Shayne," Naudes said.

Paul Maxwell was growing impatient. "What is this all about, Lieutenant? All right, we were guilty of a criminal act. We admit it. We'll have to face that charge in Florida, if Mrs. Fairbarn cares to prosecute. We will make restitution now, of course."

Emily Fairbarn glared at the tall lawyer. There was more than anger, almost hatred, in the tall blonde's eyes.

"Restitution! You have destroyed a priceless historical piece, Paul Maxwell! How can you make restitution?"

"Perhaps not," Maxwell said, "but what have any of us to do with the robber who killed Matt? Why are we here now?"

Shayne turned to face all of them. Naudes stood beside him.

The medical examiner left. Shayne let his grey eyes pass across the faces of the friends and associates of the dead Mathew Johnson.

"You're here because there was no robber!" Shayne said. "I never believed there was from the first. It didn't make any sense. No one had followed me, no one knew where I was, and no one except you people and Matt Johnson knew I was carrying the box. I was out cold, Johnson was dead, and that pistol shot would not have made enough noise to worry anyone.

"The lights were out in my room when I walked in, but they were on when I woke up. The supposed robber would have had all the time he needed. There was no reason for him to drop the case and run with-

out the loot, after committing a murder to get it.

"No, the killer couldn't have followed me. He would have had to follow Johnson. But no outside robber could have known about the *homer*. How would an outside robber possibly have known Johnson would lead him to me and the box? It had to be someone on the inside."

Lieutenant Naudes looked hard at the two lawyers. Maxwell showed no expression on his lean face. Sam Bleeker had his mouth open as he realized that someone in the room was a killer.

"Those two would have known," Naudes said. "Maxwell and Bleeker."

"Yes," Shayne said, "but they also knew that the jewels were worthless, and that the *homer* was in the carrying case."

"All right—" Naudes began.

Shayne broke in. "Look at it from another angle, Lieutenant. We thought at first that a robber had sapped me, and Johnson had surprised him in the act. It was also possible that Johnson hit me, and was surprised by the killer who had followed him. But I think that what really happened was that the killer followed Johnson to my room *unaware of whose room it was*.

"The killer shot Johnson, and I surprised the killer! Only then did the killer know that it was my room. The killer saw the carrying case I had with me, and then decided to fake the robbery."

There was a long silence in the room. Molly Moore, who had sat alone and silent all this time, caught her breath. The others all looked at her. The two women showed no sympathy on their hard faces. Maxwell and Bleeker seemed confused. Lieutenant Naudes was watching the girl.

Molly Moore covered her mouth in sudden horror. "You mean," she said, "that the murder of Mr. Johnson had nothing to do with the jeweled box! It was plain murder?"

"Plain murder," Shayne said. "The killer followed Johnson to kill him. When I walked in with the jeweled box, he saw a chance to make it look like a robbery. Tell me, Miss Moore, who knew that you were staying at the Hotel Lexington?"

The pretty girl blinked. "Why, no one except Matt, Mr. Shayne."

"You were in love with Mathew Johnson?" Shayne said.

"Yes," Mr. Shayne," Molly Moore said simply. "Oh, I know what kind of man he was. I knew he was just playing with me, but I loved him."

Shayne nodded. "That was the real clue. Miss Moore was in the same hotel as myself. But she had checked in before me. She wasn't following me and it was just a coincidence that I chose the same hotel. But when the killer followed

Johnson and saw where he was going, she jumped to the conclusion that he was on his way to visit Miss Moore. She hated Miss Moore, and she hated Johnson for deserting her. She thought she had killed Matt in Miss Moore's room."

"She?" Naudes said.

All the eyes in the room turned toward the thin, red-headed figure of Alice Johnson. Paul Maxwell stepped away from the woman. Sam Bleeker seemed more scared than ever. Molly Moore's mouth seemed to be shaping the word, *no . . . no. . . .* Only Emily Fairbarn was not looking at the widow. The tall blonde was looking at Shayne. Shayne returned her stare with his lips set in tight lines, his eyes accusing.

"No, not Mrs. Johnson," he said. "Miss Moore would never have told her she was going to be in New York, and where she was going to stay. And Mrs. Johnson would not have had to drop the priceless box where we could find it."

Emily Fairbarn smiled. "Are you suggesting *I* killed Matt?" she said. "Not that he did not deserve to be killed."

Molly Moore suddenly gasped. "I remember! When I made my reservation Mrs. Fairbarn was still in Mr. Johnson's office. She was alone! She—"

"She heard you reserve at the Hotel Lexington," Shayne said. "Johnson had some lipstick on his

face that should turn out to be hers. I think the police will find the gun even though she probably tried to get rid of it."

"Your first mistake, Mr. Shayne," Emily Fairbarn said.

Shayne looked into the tiny muzzle of the small '22 caliber automatic. It was pearl-handled and looked like a toy. But it was not a toy. And the woman behind the automatic had hard, arrogant eyes.

"Yes, I killed Matt. That little tramp there was the last straw. All these years I was his mistress. Just his mistress because he felt sorry for Alice! I took all his flirting, but when he started again with that Moore girl it was too much. He laughed at me this time, I was old now. Then I heard that he was taking the girl to New York.

Flaunting her in front of me! It was too much!"

"So you killed him. You followed him to what you thought was Miss Moore's room. I imagine I surprised you when I came in," Shayne said.

"Yes, Mr. Shayne. I suppose I should have killed you too. Perhaps I can correct that error."

The woman tightened her finger on the trigger of the toylike automatic. But she was too late. While she had been talking, Lieutenant Naudes had inched toward her. Shayne lunged aside just as the small pistol barked once. The bullet struck the far wall. Naudes leaped on the woman before she could fire again.

Emily Fairbarn crumpled into a heap on the floor of the dim room. The tall woman was crying, and Shayne knew it was not for herself but for the man she had killed.

BEFORE SHAYNE left to catch his return jet that evening, he sat in the office of Lieutenant Naudes and answered the single question Naudes asked.

"What was that about she had to leave that Moghul box for us to find?" Naudes said.

"It was what made me know she was our killer," Shayne said. "If Maxwell or Bleeker had killed Johnson, they would have been sure to take the box with them. They knew the jewels were worthless, and they knew about the *homer*. They would not have wanted the box found.

"If it had been Miss Moore or Mrs. Johnson they would have taken it to make the robbery look completely legitimate, and because they thought it was valuable. Only the Fairbarn woman would not have taken it."

"Why not?" Naudes said.

"Because it belonged to her. If she left it where we could find it, she would get it back. If she took it she could never show it again because that would convict her of murder. She couldn't bear to part with it. That was her mistake."

Mike Shayne grinned once at Lieutenant Naudes, and strode from the office to catch a taxi for Laguardia and his trip home.

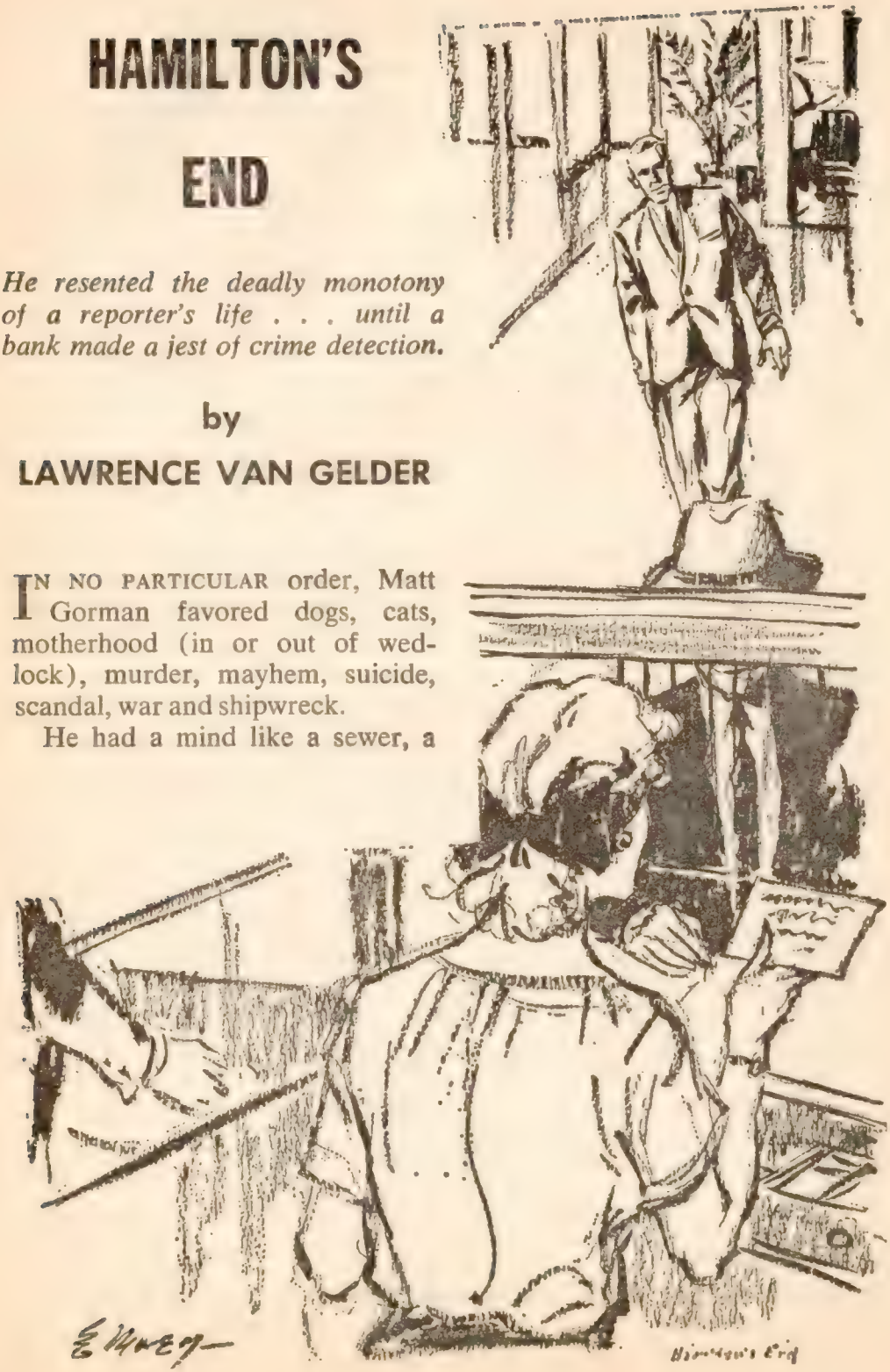
WATCH FOR—**ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**—NEXT MONTH

HAMILTON'S END

He resented the deadly monotony of a reporter's life . . . until a bank made a jest of crime detection.

by

LAWRENCE VAN GELDER



IN NO PARTICULAR order, Matt Gorman favored dogs, cats, motherhood (in or out of wedlock), murder, mayhem, suicide, scandal, war and shipwreck.

He had a mind like a sewer, a

heart as grand and giving as a fly-speck and the tenderness of a rust-scabbed bear trap.

He was a city editor.

"Get the hell out of my sight," he shouted. "Come near me again, I'll kill you—"

Harry Hamilton was already out of earshot, hiding in the locker room.

It had been a mistake to ask for a raise.

Standing alone in the semi-darkness under the broken bulbs, amid the litter of yesterday's editions and the dusty reproach of empty whiskey bottles, Hamilton was aware of the pistol clipped to his belt. It was a relic of a time before Gorman, when he was a young reporter running the streets in the troubled night when the sirens sang the city's song.

For months on end the gun was no more to him than a tie or shoe, to be put on the morning and taken off again at night.

He had never used it.

But it marked him as one of an older breed who had flourished in the days when the business throbbed to a more violent beat and reporters were the legends men were made of.

Once, one night in the blackness before dawn, when he thought back over the skein of broken promise and frayed ambition knitted into the shabby fabric of his life, he had thought of using the gun—on himself.

He knew the currency of courage some men used to buy what they wanted most in life. He had seen them scrawled grotesquely in the streets outside banks, their blood tracing the last dark eddy of their passion on the pavement. He had seen their victims. He had seen them broken and sobbing. He had seen their hands raised in triumph.

He knew what men would risk, win or lose, right or wrong, when greed took complete possession of their minds. But he had lacked the courage as much to fail as to win and he had turned the muzzle of the gun from himself and never thought of taking his own life again.

Hamilton put suicide behind him. It lay in the undiscovered history of his mature years, along with the hidden ambitions of his youth—to write, to paint, to achieve something—anything—that would set him apart, give him riches, and some sort of unspecified freedom that would save him from the feeling that he was victimized, trapped, caught in the mind-deadening ebb and flow of city desk assignments that meant nothing to him and filled him with a deepening despair.

He had been unwilling to pay the price. But he could not kill the rankling urge. As he grew older, as he passed forty, it came to him less frequently, and for that, at least, he was grateful.

MATT GORMAN scarcely glanced at the letter before tossing it back to the assistant city editor.

"Send Harry Hamilton, Lenny," he said.

A copy boy delivered the letter to the locker room. "Gorman says he wants you to go," he said.

He did not look at Hamilton as he delivered his flat announcement. Hamilton was an outcast, a living lesson, a breathing handbook of *Don'ts*. The copy boy turned away, an eager carbon-smeared moth, to flutter back to Gorman at the city desk, a brighter, if more wing-searing flame.

Hamilton called the city desk from a pay booth in the corridor outside the locker room, got Lenny Wiltse on the phone.

"Gorman wants me out of the office," he said.

"Gorman wants you out of the office," Lenny echoed.

"I don't have to be there for five hours, you know."

"So what?" Lenny said. "Take yourself a holiday. What difference does it make."

"You think I'm no good."

There was no reply.

"You think I'm no good," Harry Hamilton repeated. "Isn't that so?"

"Now, nobody said—"

"You don't think I can handle the heavy stuff any more. Well, I'm telling you, I'm still good. You think these smart kids are everything. Why don't you answer me? Why don't you say something for yourself for once? You're always Gorman's mouthpiece. Don't you ever do anything on your own? I'm human, Lenny, I'm human."

"Look, just go handle the assignment, will you? And come back in and write it yourself for Monday. We'll wait for you. If you want to talk some more—"

"I'm not a kid. You don't have to humor me," Hamilton said. "I know what I'm worth. I'm still good. You can't beat me down. Tell it—tell it to Gorman. Tell him I said so."

"Gawd," said Lenny Wiltse, and hung up.

Over lunch that day, Lenny said to Gorman, "You want to get rid of him, don't you?"

"Who?"

"Hamilton."

"Now I don't know what makes you think that," Gorman said. "But as long as you're thinking for a change, I'll tell you you're right."

"Well, you can't just fire him, you know. We've got a contract here. He doesn't drink, so you can't get him for that. He isn't insubordinate and he doesn't foul up."

Gorman smiled. "Well, Lenny my boy, there are ways. He'll foul up, one way or another. And I'll be there when he does. So don't get any bright humanitarian ideas about covering for him. You can be replaced, too. Hamilton doesn't fit into my way, and that means he goes. Don't bother to tell me what

he's done for the paper, either. I know the whole story. Good police, general assignment, a little stint in the Korean War overseas. The last decent story he turned in was eight, ten years ago. I don't run an old folks home for reporters in their declining years."

Gorman narrowed his eyes. "It's a rough business and I play it rough. The name Harry Hamilton doesn't mean a thing to me—except as a sign of dead wood on the payroll. So out he goes and no lost sleep. If that strikes you as cold-blooded, and unprincipled, I couldn't care less. If you're making an issue of it because you think I'll do the same to you, you can get up and leave right now. All you've got to remember is that I run the show in that city room and I run it my way."

"But—" Lenny said.

"What do you like for dessert?" Gorman asked.

THE MANAGER of the 14th Street branch of the Express National Bank, said: "Mr. Hamilton, we're very proud of these TV-spy cameras. They mark the completion of a completely new detective device system in each of our twenty-nine branches. We're the first in the city to install them."

Hamilton nodded and scribbled a few notes. It was seven minutes after four. The bank was closed and behind the open counters the tellers were tabulating the day's receipts. Friday was always a busy day—payrolls out, and the week's business deposits in.

"We've been thinking, Mr. Hamilton, that there's no reason in the world why you couldn't stage a mock holdup. We'll get one of the girls to pull the alarm, setting off the cameras, and we'll see that you get the films, so you can use the pictures with your story. Mr. Alden from our public relations department thought it would be an unusual idea."

"I could get shot," Hamilton said.

The manager laughed. "Oh, no," he said. "For one thing, we don't arm our guards. And the police have already been notified. We run periodic tests of the system, you see, and when we do we simply notify the people who maintain the alarm system and they in turn notify the police that we're running a test in the Fourteenth Street branch. It's done all the time."

"Cry wolf," Hamilton muttered.

"What's that?" the manager said.

"Nothing, said Hamilton. "How many of these cameras do you have?"

"Three here, and one hundred and ten all together in our branches. Some have as many as six, others just one or two. The L-shaped layout here needs three."

In the basement, the manager showed Hamilton the control pan-

el. "The whole system is tied in as a silent alarm and camera setup," he explained. "These dials tell us the number of frames shot by each of the cameras."

"Each one shoots two frames of thirty-five millimeter film a second, up to eight hundred frames over a period of nearly seven minutes. We've found," he said as they climbed back upstairs, "that the average bank robber—we're talking now of the note-passing type, Mr. Hamilton—takes approximately forty-five seconds to leave the premises."

"That seems like a long time," Hamilton said.

"Well, these figures are taken from a survey by our security division. Your note-passer tends to rely on inconspicuousness. In his dress, his demeanor, his movements, he wants to be as colorless as possible. When he leaves, he doesn't hurry. That's why these cameras are especially valuable.

"They enable us to spot characteristics overlooked by the eyewitness. I don't mind telling you that during the installation period that began in our system last year two men were identified from these films and sentenced."

"Very interesting," said Hamilton.

"The films, of course, are admissible as evidence."

"Once you catch him."

"Yes, once we catch him, Mr. Hamilton."

"Well, what do you propose?" Hamilton said.

"We were thinking," the manager said, "that you could walk up to the counter and pass over a note to one of the girls. She'll pretend to give you the money, and then when you turn away, she'll pull the silent alarm, starting the cameras. We'd appreciate your taking the longest way to the far exit, so we can give the cameras a good workout."

"If I went that way," Hamilton said, pointing, "in behind those pillars to the center exit, you wouldn't get much film on me. The pillars would cover me twice."

The manager gave a deprecating smile. "Yes, but remember what I told you. The average robber doesn't want to do anything out of the ordinary. Now the route you describe wouldn't be especially direct and might draw attention."

"Well," said Hamilton, "it's the sort of thing you might look out for when word gets around about these cameras. They might work out some new techniques."

"We'll keep it in mind. If you'd like to try a second run-through afterward, using your route, we can arrange it. It might prove interesting."

"I'll think about it," Hamilton said.

Hamilton sat down at the manager's desk and printed a note. It said, "Take your time. Get me all the money you can. Put it in envelopes. I have a gun and will shoot to kill anyone who gets in my way. This is not a joke."

The manager permitted himself a smile when he read it. "A very nice specimen of its type," he said. "If you're going to need it for your story, I'd suggest you make a copy. We instruct our girls to keep them. Helpful in court."

"Thanks," said Hamilton. "I will."

"Are you ready now?"

"Yes," said Hamilton.

"All right," the manager called down to the basement. "I'll call them again to turn off the cameras when you've finished. Now Dolores," he said to the teller, "Mr. Hamilton here is going to give you a note. When he does, you pretend to fill up the envelopes and when he turns away, pull the alarm, just as you've been instructed to do."

Hamilton walked up to the counter. "Don't smile," he told Dolores. "I'm supposed to be inconspicuous." The girl giggled, read the note, and made a silent "Oh" with her mouth. She pushed an empty coin sack toward him, and Hamilton took it, turned away and walked around a corner of the bank to the farthest exit.

"Okay," the manager called.

"You handled that very well," he said briskly when they were seated at his desk ten minutes later, "we'll have these films delivered to your office tomorrow."

There was a sudden commotion at the door. Two uniformed policemen with drawn guns, their tunics open, strode into the manager's office ahead of a grim-faced sergeant.

"Oh my God," the manager said. "Don't say anything" he whispered to Hamilton as he rose to greet them.

Two plainclothesmen had also appeared at the door, followed by a lieutenant.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," the manager said. "Test."

"We could have got ourselves killed racing here," the sergeant said. "We could have run down a pedestrian."

"I don't know how it could have happened."

"What's your name?" the sergeant asked.

"Morrow. Christopher Morrow. I'm manager here. I want you to know we notified the alarm people. We *told* them we were going to run a test. They'll hear about this. Believe me they will."

"What is this?" the lieutenant demanded.

"Just a test," the sergeant said. "Some sort of foul up in signals."

The sergeant finished writing in his notebook. "All right," he said.

The police trooped out, shaking their heads in resentment. When the door had closed behind them the manager said to Hamilton. "We train our people that these alarms aren't to be pulled casually. We notified the alarm people we were going to run a test here." He was already dialing a number.

"This is Morrow," he said, "Fourteenth Street branch. I thought I told you we were running a test here. Yes, six hundred West. No, not East—West. We just had the place full of cops. You'll be hearing more from us. You'll be hearing in writing. Now we're going to run another one. Do you think you can get it straight this time. Six hundred West. Try very hard, will you?"

Morrow laughed nervously. "You won't be printing that in your story, will you?" he said, turning back to Hamilton. "I mean it wouldn't look good for us or for your paper if the police knew why we were running the test. I knew you'd understand. And now, perhaps you'd like to run through it just once more, your way this time. I can assure you there won't be any interruptions."

"Yes," said Hamilton. "Yes, indeed. That would be very nice."

MATT GORMAN looked up at the clock. It was six. "Why don't you go home, Lenny?" he said. The afternoon's editions were piled high in front of him. The city room, vast and littered, was nearly empty.

"I told Hamilton I'd—we'd wait for him. I told him to come back and write it himself, and if he wanted to talk—"

"He's overdue then, isn't he?" Gorman said with a smile. "Well, then, maybe—"

The telephone buzzed.

"Yes, Miss Logan," Gorman said. "How are things in personnel? Expense money for Brazil? A passport!"

He slammed the phone onto the hook.

"Where the hell did you send Hamilton?" he demanded.

"You sent him. The bank."

Gorman was already dialing.

"Gorman!" he shouted. "City editor. Argus. How much? Say it again." He slumped in his seat. "Hamilton got away with a quarter of a million, Lenny. *A quarter of a million!* Oh, the dirty little—"

And then his eyes grew bright.

"I told you, Lenny," he crowed. "I told you he'd foul up."

Police Chief Bordon was a harshly unbending man

. . . until a brutal crime made justice seem

more than an abstraction.

A Shockingly Realistic Novelet of Small Town Violence

The Mick Fuzz

by ED LACY

TURNING THE radio car into Dune Road, I heard the jittery wail of the rock and roll band, the drunken cries miles away in the mild May night. Salt spray was strong in the air, an off-shore wind carrying the sounds of the party like a loud speaker.

The Landons had purchased old Captain Wilson's house, a big, old house with a Widow's Walk and a few acres of land. The band was playing on the flagstone terrace they'd added, with some forty young men and women in bright evening clothes dancing and raising hell.

Coming up the driveway, I saw a couple of young men busting windows on one side of the house with empty champagne bottles, while another group was busy heaving plates at the Japanese lanterns strung across the lawn. Up on the Widow's Walk a few couples were wrestling.

The sight of the police car put a slight damper on the racket. As I stepped out and crossed to the bandstand, a tall silver-haired man in a tux staggered toward me. I motioned for the band leader to stop the music. The silence was abrupt and heavy. The tall man waved a glass at me.

"I'm Jackson Landon, officer," he said. Care for some champagne, a box of cigars for the boys?"

"Chief Alvin Bordon of the Bay

Harbor police," I said, brushing the glass aside. "You'll have to move the band inside the house, sir. It's after one a.m. and people have been complaining about the noise."

There was the crash of a window on the other side of the house, followed by drunken cheers. The others had formed a sullen ring around us. A stocky blond man looking like a second-string tackle, a food stain across his white dinner jacket, said loudly, "A store cop in a baby blue outfit."

His buddy, also beefy and crocked, added, "Hick fuzz, would spoil our fun to make a name for himself."

Landon tried placing his arm around my shoulder. "Now Chief, this is a special occasion. My daughter's graduated college—to my surprise, frankly." He giggled and the others laughed. "A party to—"

"Take the band inside, Mr. Landon," I said. "Ask your guests to settle down."

He removed his hand from my shoulder. "Come now, officer, be reasonable," he said. "There's hardly room inside for all her guests."

"Then the party's over."

Another window was smashed, the sounds loud in the still night. "The party certainly is not over! Chief, if the kids are breaking things, it's my property. You've no right to invade private property unless a serious crime has been committed."

"Mr. Landon, you're creating a disturbance and we've had complaints. Either you move the dance inside or—"

"Daddy, don't let him spoil my party," a tall girl of about twenty said, walking unsteadily towards us. Her low-cut gown proved she had a full bosom.

"Don't worry your pretty head about it, honey," Landon said, winking at me. "Suppose we go inside and talk this over, officer."

I shook my head. "There's nothing to talk over. The noise will have to stop—now."

"Let's take big mouth!" This said by the blond fellow.

I told Landon. "Tell your guests to watch what they're saying."

"I resent your high-handed methods, officer. I damn well do!" Landon drew himself up. "I pay taxes. In fact, we estate owners practically support the Harbor. Also, I have influence in high places."

"Mr. Landon, if you have any complaints, the Bay Harbor council meets every Friday afternoon. If the band plays another note out here, I'll arrest them for disorderly conduct. That's it."

I started for the car. Blondie and his big buddy came at me, running low. I sidestepped blondie but the other man's shoulder hit my leg, and knocked me down. The 'kids' sent up a cheer. Rolling

over I jumped up as blondie turned, came at me again.

A left to his gut sent him to his knees. He stayed there, throwing up. I turned as his beefy pal sent a wild right my way. A right hook to his belly doubled him up as he hit the lawn.

Landon yelled, "You brute! I'll sue the Harbor for—"

Cuffing blondie's right to his buddy's left hand, I jerked them both to their feet, and pushed them toward the police car. "You're under arrest for assaulting an office of the law."

The silence was so heavy I could hear the waves pounding the shore as I shoved them into the back of the car, slid in behind the wheel.

Landon came alongside the car. "Now wait up, Chief. Fun is fun but assault—that's a damn serious charge."

"That's right, Mr. Landon, assaulting a police officer is mighty serious," I snapped as I drove away.

Maybe it took me ten minutes to reach the Bay Harbor police station, which is part of the old building also serving as fire house and the City Hall. We have a three-man force, plus a few 'specials' for the summer weekend traffic.

Lenny Johnson works the night shift, so he can help out at his uncle's gas station afternoons. I booked the two for assault and disorderly conduct, and had Lenny put them in our one detention cell. That took another ten minutes.

Landon wasn't joking about his influence. At 2 a.m. the phone rang and a deep voice said, "Chief Bordon? This is State Senator Don Edwards. I don't have the pleasure of representing Bay Harbor, but I'm in River County. Mr. Landon, a close friend of mine, just phoned me about a little misunderstanding. Let's face it. The two young men were drunk, and lost their heads. I'm for law and order, but this was pure horseplay. Are you really booking them for assault, Chief?"

"I already have, Senator. Also for drunk and disorderly conduct."

"Chief Bordon, let's be sensible about all this. Why not let them sleep it off and forget about booking them? I'm certain a night in a cell will be sufficient punishment. One of the lads intends to study law, and both come from respectable families. A serious charge, such as assault, won't be easy to live down."

"Senator, I've booked them for assault because they made threatening remarks, then attacked me," I said. "Tomorrow they will be arraigned before Judge Mason, in Hampton."

"Chief, that's exactly why I want to nip this in the bud. I know Judge Mason quite well, but it will be far less embarrassing if you'll forget the charges."

"Senator, they broke the law

and I arrested them. I must also tell you that all our telephone calls are tape recorded."

"Well, all right. I was merely trying to explain the situation, Chief. Goodnight."

Lenny Johnson grinned as I hung up. "Big stink coming, Al?"

"Looks like it," I said. "I'm going home. If you receive any other calls about these two, say I'll be on duty at eight a.m. Don't call me unless it's an emergency."

WHEN I GOT into bed, Martha twisted awake, mumbled, "You're late, hon."

I told her what had happened and she said, "The nerve of them knocking you down. Can they do anything to you, hon?"

"If this State Senator is an example, there will be pressure. But we Harbor folk stick together." I patted her on the shoulder. "Don't worry about it."

Martha snuggled up to me. "I never worry about you, Al. you're a good police officer. Oh, while I think of it. Jim Harris dropped in after supper. He said he'd have to charge at least six hundred dollars to reshingle the roof."

"I guess it will last another year," I said, dozing off.

The radio clock awoke us at seven a.m. I dropped Martha off at the bakery, where she works and crossed over to the police station. As soon as I entered a flash bulb went off in my face, a photographer crouching in front of me like a sniper. A smartly dressed young woman was waiting, and Lenny Johnson took me aside.

"Mr. Landon phoned twice," he said, "and there's been a few calls from the New York City papers. The young lady is Mrs. Carla Martin from *Newstime* magazine. I don't get all the fuss over those two clowns. Otherwise a quiet night."

"Okay. Lenny, take a fast ride around the Harbor before you knock off and pick up Roger on your way in. Did you feed the prisoners?"

"Sure. Coffee and eggs."

When Lenny left I turned to Mrs. Martin. "I'm Chief Alvin Bordon. The story on the two young men is—"

"I'm here to do a story about *you,* Chief Bordon," she broke in. "It took courage to arrest those two football players." She had a low, throaty voice and a smile that I liked.

"Courage?"

"I suppose you had in mind

that debutante party a few years ago when they tore the house apart?"

"Mrs. Martin, I only had in mind they broke the law and I arrested them."

"Come now, Chief, you can talk plainer than that. I'm on your side. You're the head of a three-man police force, and Mr. Landon is a Wall Street wheeler-dealer. Both of the arrested men come from prominent families. Are you going to back down on the charges?"

"I don't get you, Mrs. Martin. Of course I'm not backing down."

She smiled, wrinkling her cute nose—a practiced movement. "I admire you. You look about thirty-five, a long way from your pension."

"I don't get a pension. My job isn't civil service, in that sense. Our Harbor Council appoints the police—and fires them."

"Then you are a brave man. I've been told your father was a police chief of Bay Harbor?"

"Yes. He was killed by hoodlums when I was a baby."

She stared at me for a second. "Tell me, why are you so stubborn about pressing charges? As I said, I admire you, Chief Bordon, but to be practical, in the face of pressure most police officers would have made less of an issue out of it."

"Mrs. Martin, I'm not being stubborn. They broke the law and I arrested them. The only way a police officer can function is to enforce *all* laws impartially. Spit on the sidewalk and I'll arrest you. Park over an hour—you get a ticket."

She wrinkled her nose again. "My, you must be very busy."

"It makes the job easier if you do it completely. Start closing your eyes to minor law-breaking and the job becomes impossible. During Prohibition the coast was infested with rum runners. Unfortunately my Dad was good-natured and somewhat easygoing. If he had arrested punks for crossing against the lights, littering the streets—all the so-called minor laws—the hoods would never have gotten a foothold in the Harbor and he might still be alive."

"Have you read much of Rudyard Kipling, Chief Bordon?"

I shook my head. "I don't have very much time for reading."

"Kipling wrote," she said:

" 'Now these are the Laws of the Jungle,
'And many and mighty are they!
'But the head and the hoof of the Law
'And the haunch and the hump is
'—OBEY.'

"Can I say that sums up your theory of law enforcement?"

"I don't have theories, nor do I make the laws or judge them," I told her. "I just enforce them. I'm kind of busy, so—"

"Two more questions. Do you mind telling me your salary?"

"It's a matter of record. I take home sixty-three dollars and ninety-two cents every week."

"Thank you. Can my photographer get a shot of the two boys?"

"Nope. That would be an invasion of their rights of privacy. And they're not boys. Both are over twenty-one."

My phone rang. Mrs. Martin waved and left with her photographer. Old Mrs. Ables on Bay Road was on the phone, claiming somebody had backed a car into her rose bushes early in the morning. She hadn't seen who did it. I agreed that it was a darn shame, and I'd keep an eye open for a car with roses on the bumpers.

The phone kept ringing for the next hour: a big time football coach, a New York City judge, a fellow who said he bought most of the Harbor clams—all asking me to drop the charges. The only caller I even knew a little was a State Trooper inspector who said, "Al, this is awkward to say but I—eh—I know the father of one of the men you arrested last night, and he asked me to—you know—Any chance of you changing your mind?"

"Nope."

"You have to play it as you think best, Al. Like I had to call."

"Sure," I said and hung up.

Jim Harris called. "Been trying to reach you all morning. Did Martha speak to you, Al?"

"She did. We just don't have that kind of money, Jim."

"That roof won't last another winter. Get us a real blow and you'll be in trouble. Al, let me work on the roof over the summer. We'll arrange time payments. No banks—just between us."

"I appreciate that, Jim. I'll talk it over with Martha, and call you back later."

I phoned Jud Halt, publisher of the weekly *Harbor Express*. "Jud, I arrested a couple of drunks last night on the Landon estate. *Newstime* just had a reporter in my office. I'll give you the complete story, later. Really isn't much."

"Thanks, Al. *Newstime,* well now! Last time they mentoined the Harbor was in the thirty eight hurricane."

There were more calls from people I never heard of, some from Albany. Roger Watkins, who works the day shift, came in at 9 a.m. I told him about Mrs. Ables' roses. He'd found a loose rowboat floating near the dock.

At 9:30 I took the two men from their cell, both of them still sullen. "I'm taking you over to court in Hampton. I'm not handcuffing you. You're in enough trouble now, so don't try anything stupid."

There were quite a few reporters, and lawyers, at Hampton. Judge Mason put us on first, ar-

raigned the men after I testified and released them in $1000 bail each, which was promptly furnished.

I was back in the Harbor by 11 a.m., and Roger went off to patrol the village in our one squad car. Mayor Richard Ellis left his furniture store and walked over to where I was standing in the doorway of the police station. Ellis is an old man with a shrill voice.

"Al," he said. "I've been receiving calls from the city papers about those drunks you arrested. I want you to know the Council will back you up all the way."

"Nothing to back me up about, Dick. They tried to attack me and I arrested them. There might be a little fuss in the papers for a day, although I don't know why. But I don't think it will hurt the summer tourist business."

He shrilled, "By God, your granddaddy and mine sailed the last of the whaling boats and no outsider, estate or no, can run *our* town! British tried it two centuries ago and we showed 'em. Say, I heard strippers were running under the bridge last night. Well, I'd best be on my way to the post office."

When Roger returned I did a turn along our three block Main Street, putting a chalk mark on the tires of parked cars. I saw Jud Halt and then had lunch with Martha in the back of the bakery.

"Let's have an early supper and fish for strippers," I told her. "Low tide at about eight."

"Okay, hon. But it means I'll miss the Lucy Show."

I walked around Main Street again, giving out two tickets for parking over an hour. In summer

it was different, of course, but one of the things which made Bay Harbor feel it was *my* town, I knew everybody on the street.

Returning to my office, I let Roger go for lunch. There was a message to phone Edmund Laker, collect, at a New York City number. I grinned. Ed was late getting into the act; the case was out of my hands now. Chief Tanner of Thump Island, across the bay, phone to ask if we'd seen a white rowboat with blue trim. I told him it was tied up at the dock.

"Belongs to Walt Jones' kid," Tanner said. "He'll be over to get it later. I just got the city papers," he went on after a pause. "I see you're a bloody hero of law and order, Al. Those snotty rich kids. As the editorial said, it's time the police showed the wealthy they're not beyond the law."

"Editorial? I can't understand all the fuss. Tell the Jones kid to see me before taking his boat."

No sooner did I hang up than Ed Laker called from New York. His house on the outskirts of the Harbor is mainly a summer place but he has a 36-foot fisherman special, a sea boat you can't buy for under twenty grand.

"Al," he said, "it's important I see you this evening. I'm driving down to the Harbor to talk to you."

"Ed, those two drunks are already out on bail, nothing you—"

"Al, I don't know what the hell you're talking about. This is something else, a personal matter. Will you be home at eight?"

"I'll probably be on the bridge. Hear strippers are running."

"Glad you told me, Al. I'll stop at my place and pick up a rod first. I have a hell of a personal favor to ask of you. See you, Al."

II

I MADE THE daily patrol of the summer cottages, all of them still shut, and was having supper with Martha by 6:45. She said, "I thought your picture was going to be in the papers, hon? I liked the news stories."

"That was a *Newstime* photographer. Mag only comes out twice a month. Every one will probably forget the story before it breaks." I was admiring the way she moved around the kitchen. Martha's a big woman, as tall as I am and weighing over 160 pounds. She had always been large, even as a kid, and had always moved gracefully for her size. It was odd we never had kids, although there was still time and it didn't bother either of us.

Kissing her, I said, "Wear a parka tonight. It will be chilly on the bridge."

Kissing me back hard, she dug her fingers into my shirt. "Got a belly ridged as a washing board. Hon, your muscles excite the devil out of me." She kissed me again. "I can't go fishing. Mae

Kimmel and her sister are coming over, something about the raffle for the Harbor Improvement Society. I'm sorry, Al."

"It's okay—strippers be running for months," I said, kissing her behind the ear. Martha giggled and I put on an old windbreaker, took my tackle box, a strong handline and a new plastic reel. I gave her an admiring wink. "I'll be home by nine, hon."

Main Street was quiet, a few kids outside the soda shop. I stopped my old Chevy at the two white lines crossing the center of Main Street. There are STOP signs on both ends of the lines. Last summer, when Edmund Laker bought his house in August, I'd been making a wrap-up of the Harbor at 11 p.m. when I saw this foreign roadster cross the lines without stopping. I turned the siren on, flagged him down at the Otter Pond.

Laker is a handsome man in his late forties, a good dresser. He'd seemed amused when I asked if he hadn't seen the STOP signs. "I saw them, officer. That's a pedestrian crossing, but at this hour there wasn't a soul on the streets. So I saw no reason to stop."

"No time limit on the signs," I'd said, writing out a ticket."

"Officer, I fully understand the intent of the law but there won't be anybody on Main Street before morning. You're being unreasonable."

"Argue with the judge," I told him. "I only enforce the law. I once fired a 'special officer for passing those white lines."

We'd talked about the 'theory of law' and I again had the impression Laker was amused at a 'hick' cop being so strict, although he didn't say it in so many words. Weeks later, when I'd been trying to start my outboard, he came by in his fishing cruiser and we went trolling for snappers, and a few times we'd chummed for blues.

A wind with the promise of rain was blowing on the bridge. The only bite I got was a dumb sand shark who ruined my one dollar plastic lure. When Ed Laker stopped in a low slung Jaguar, a new one, I told him nothing much was happening.

"Let's go to my place for beers," he said.

We stopped at the office. Roger, who had made his last patrol of the Harbor, said, "Al, keep an eye on the dirt road near the swamp. I heard talk of a drag race."

"Not tonight, it's clouding up for rain," I told Roger. "If you need me, I'll be at the Laker place for about an hour. Then I'm going straight home."

I'd never been inside the Laker ranch house before and even though it was still closed for the winter, it was damn comfortable. There was a fireplace in the center of the living room, under a cone-shaped metal chimney. Ed

started the fire, opened cans of imported beer, and talked about the overhauling he was having done on his boat.

Suddenly he asked, "Al, didn't you once tell me you get a vacation about now? Before the summer tourists hit the Harbor?"

"Yeah, I take off a week in June," I said.

"How would you like to work for me during that week, make seven hundred bucks?"

"What could I do that's worth a hundred a day, Ed?"

"Don't get that police tone in your voice, Al, until you hear me out. I've always been impressed by your respect for the law, your honesty. I can imagine the pressure on you for arresting those two drunken football players, and I admire a man who refuses to compromise in a world of the double-cross.

"Now, let me get down to the reason I'm here. I have only one child and I'm rather proud the way my Barbara has turned out. She could have so easily ended up a spoiled brat. She's pretty, intelligent, and will receive her B.A. degree next week and go on to graduate work in the Fall. Mrs. Laker is taking her to Europe for the summer, a graduation gift."

"That's fine, but what has this to do with me, Ed?"

"Barbara is interested in motion pictures as an art form. She wants to start producing her own documentaries in time, actually make it her career. Now, in college she's become a member of SAV—Students Against Violence, a civil rights group. She—"

"What did you let her get mixed up with them for?" I cut in. Ed raised his eyebrows in surprise. "All this mass picketing, and sit-ins. Fighting for civil rights doesn't put them above the law."

"Al, your narrow concept of the law amazes me. There's a higher law, of self-preservation, which states that no man should go hungry, at least not be hungry and meek, or get his can stepped on because of his color or religion.

"But, Al, I'm not here to argue law with you. As for Barbara, I'm proud she has the guts to do this. She and a few other students plan to make a short film on civil rights. My Barbara is the type who says what she thinks, and hasn't as yet learned the hypocrisy we call subtlety. She'd have a fit if she knew I was sticking my nose into this but I have a nightmare of some lumpen lout hurting her.

"I want you to tag along as a sort of unseen bodyguard. Being away at college, Barbara has only been out to the Harbor once, and doesn't know you."

He handed me another bottle of beer. I traced a design in the icy sweat on the side of the bottle. "Ed," I said, "my shield has no authority outside the Harbor—certainly not in some Southern town.

Nor is it for special protection or for hire. A third reason: if I saw your daughter breaking the law, no matter what her motive, I'd be in favor of arresting her."

Ed Laker kicked off his shoes as he laughed. "That's exactly what I expected you to say, Al, I really wouldn't be so foolish as to ask you to do anything unethical. But this is not going to take place in the South but right in this state —way up near Canada. And I'm not hiring your badge. What's more, these kids don't break the law, because their credo is against all violence. They actually want the very letter of the law lived up to. You should be on their side.

"The whole deal is to take five days. In fact, on the sixth day Barbara is due to sail for Europe. Al, if you must have a title, I'm hiring you as—as my personal secretary. All I ask is that you remain near Barbara, without her realizing it, and stop any slob from taking the law into his own hands."

"I completely trust your judgement and ability to handle any situation which may arise."

Finishing my beer in silence, I heard the quiet rattle of rain against the picture window. "What is happening up near Canada?" I asked.

"Mattonville is a small lumber town a dozen miles this side of the border. Seems there's a forgotten Indian tribe there, the Cleves. Barbara met one of them—a Nancy Akeah—in college. Near as I get it, their movie will prove that the living conditions of the tribe haven't been bettered during the more than eighty years they've been wards of Washington. Trouble isn't expected, but I'd feel better with you there."

"Ed, isn't seven hundred dollars a lot to pay for only that?"

He shrugged. "As you won't be able to take your wife, this can be spoiling your vacation plans. I can

afford it, and, please, don't think I'm overpaying you."

Martha and I never left the Harbor during vacations. It would have been silly, with fishing and swimming right at our doorstep. "Technically, I'm a Peace Officer anyplace within the state," I told him. "But I won't carry a gun."

"Al, Al, I don't expect you to. The chances are a thousand to one there won't be the smallest trouble. But I have this—thing about Barbara, and I want to take every precaution. Reading about you in today's papers convinced me you were the right man. Think it over,

Al. Barbara isn't due to reach Mattonville until June third."

"I'll talk it over with my wife," I said, raising my voice. The rain, driven by a sudden gust, was making a racket. A real strong wind and I wouldn't have any roof.

III

SOMEBODY ONCE said all small towns are alike. Mattonville has the same two thousand population as Bay Harbor, but it's a bleak little village. Perhaps because I'm an ocean man, I missed the beach and salt smell. Their main street is short and minus the expensive gift shops, the summer theatre we have for the tourists.

Mattonville didn't even have a movie and most of the buildings were frame deals, badly in need of paint. It was cool for June and I wondered how the frame houses made out in winter. Even with the squat, old brick sawmill and the modern paper mill, Mattonville still seemed only a clearing in the woods and distant mountains.

I arrived a day before the students were due, took a room at the one hotel, a two-story wooden building above a dingy bar, all of it like an old cowboy movie. The membership list of the Police Chiefs Association included Chief James Williams of Mattonville and as soon as I cleaned up, I went to see him.

The police station was something—a strong and compact stone building with a heavy wooden door and windows narrow as gun slits. The inside seemed very well equipped. In a locked gun rack along one wall I saw dozens of rifles, sub-machine guns and tear gas guns. Their radio was new and powerful and on another wall I saw six bull horns.

Jim Williams was a tall man with the start of a belly, wearing a plain brown uniform. He seemed about forty-five with thin, red hair trying to cover a large bald head above a hard, big-featured face. Shaking my hand hard, he took me into his office and pulled a bottle from a drawer in the polished desk.

"Take a load off your feet," he said. "First time I ever had a visiting police chief. You get lost driving to Canada? We don't get many tourists up this way."

"I'm not here as a tourist or as a police chief, I said, and proceeded to explain exactly why I was there.

He listened with a look of surprise on his face. "Hell's bells, Al, Indians ain't no problem here. There's about seventy-five Cleves on a reservation outside town. They mostly keep to themselves, and we've never had no trouble with 'em in my time.

"While I don't go for anybody sticking their noses into my business, these college kids can take all the pictures they want, so long as

they obey the laws. I run a strict town. All laws are respected, including local ordinances."

"I'm for that." I shook my head as he started to pour a second shot of Canadian whiskey. "Any trouble before your time, Jim?"

"Oh, when I was a boy coming up, some of the Indian gals were pretty wild. Sold their favors, you might say. Guys used to go out to the reservation to raise a little hell. But there's no young gals there now and we haven't had any of that stuff since Willie Akeah became head of the tribe."

"A Nancy Akeah is one of the students—his daughter?"

Jim put down a second drink. "Yeah, Nancy did go off to college a couple years ago. The Indians have the same rights here as the whites—they can vote, drink in the bars. Some of them work as porters in the mills, and their kids go to our school if they want to. But few kids do and none of 'em ever votes.

"I guess they feel it would be giving up their tribe rights, or something. Willie Akeah is a smart old boy. He has a hundred lawsuits going against the government. He claims all the timber here belongs to the Cleves. If they ever won even one of those suits, every Cleve would be rich. Actually, the Indians are better off than most folks. They got some sort of small monthly handout from Washington."

His expression became grim. "Al, we have us an unemployment problem because of this automation stuff. One guy with an electric saw cuts down more trees than a dozen lumberjacks did in a week last year. They put down a moving belt from a truck,—haul the trunks to the mill and from there machines do everything—trim the bark, slice the wood into pulp. But so far they haven't invented a mechanical broom so the Indians' jobs are safe."

He laughed loudly, showing bad teeth. "Al, I never thought being a cop was much of a job but they haven't dreamed up a mechanical nightstick yet, either. They'll never replace us with buttons. I'm mighty proud of my five-man force."

"You have five regulars?"

"You bet. Guess you noticed the gun racks outside on the wall, the metal shutters for the windows? Got us three of the fastest four-wheel-drive patrol cars in the country, even a powerful hose system and a month's supply of food and water in the basement. We're a regular fort."

I was puzzled, for Mattonville seemed a quiet town. Williams must have read my mind. "No trouble here except for a few Saturday night drunks," he said, grinning. "Of course when I was a kid it was a wild town. Indian girls coming in to take the lumberjacks' money, knifing and shootings. Even a lynching. They burned down

the old police station in thirty-four. That's why this one was built to handle any emergencies."

"The Indians attacked?"

Jim stared at me bug-eyed, then roared with laughter. "Hells bells, the Indians ain't nothing. Unions! And now with this automation coming, we don't let union organizers light. They hung a union man back in thirty-two and a union mob burned the old police station."

"It isn't against the law for a union to attempt to organize."

Williams rubbed his thick nose. "Let's say it's against the unofficial law here, because the people don't want them and it starts riots. The mills are the bread and butter of Mattonville. Maybe the wages ain't high, but when they're working our folks live well. Most of us been here for generations, meaning we own our homes. Food and clothing costs less than in the big cities, and taxes are low.

"We get along just fine and don't want unions butting in. Al, we're one of the few towns in the state without a single relief case—yet." He got to his feet and stretched. "Come on, I'll ride you around town, introduce you to Willie Akeah, take you home for supper." He slapped his belly. "The wife cooks too good."

"Thanks, Jim. Look, don't introduce me as a police officer. I'll be a tourist, or a newspaper man."

"Folks don't like reporters. We got our own paper—the *Mill Crier.* As for tourists, that would sound phony. Best you be my cousin from Syracuse. Okay?"

I shook his hand. He had heavy knuckles—a puncher. "Glad to join the family."

Their patrol cars were terrific, fast for pursuit, roomy as wagons. It didn't take long to see Mattonville. I'd already seen the short main street and there was one side street with a few drab stores including a cheap bar with a dozen or so men hanging around outside. They waved at Jim Williams, stared at me with suspicion.

The poor ugly sons were fired a month ago, but they're still getting unemployment insurance. That's the problem. They'll never work again in our mills. They should move but hell's bells, their folks have lived here for more than a century. When the unemployment checks stop, I hate to think what may pop.

"See that store over there? Office of the *Mill Crier,* Edited by Clay Turner, a sharp young fellow who came up to run the paper five years ago. He has an idea of planting maples, start a syrup industry to help the unemployed. But that will takes years. Let's go out and see Willie Akeah."

The reservation turned out to consist of a dozen frame houses, and seemed a part of Mattonville to me, except that we had to turn off the paved road, and take a dirt road for about a half a mile. The

few Indians I saw were dressed like everybody else in town, in woolen shirts and work pants. I really didn't expect to see feathers and war paint. In fact, the Indians were no darker than some of the sun-hound summer tourists in the Harbor.

Willie Akeah was a slim man with a sharp nose and deep, quiet eyes. The only thing Indian about him was his thick white hair which hung to his shoulders. He spoke slowly and carefully, and seemed friendly enough with Chief Williams. He politely shook my hand. His wife was a plump woman of about forty with high cheekbones, and long jet-black hair tied around her head like a dark turban. She offered us coffee and plain cake and a whiskey for Williams.

The only time she showed any emotion was when she mentioned that Nancy was coming home tomorrow. It would be the first time she'd seen her daughter in three years. The house was plainly furnished, the usual TV and radio sets. I gathered the Akeahs were better off than the rest of the Cleves. From his porch he showed me about an acre in vegetables and a large pigpen. A rocky stream wandered through his land and he invited me to fish for trout any time I wished.

At 4 p.m. we left and Jim talked to his office over the car radio as he drove to another end of town where all the houses were well built, many with lawns and gardens. "Mill brass lives here," Jim said as he parked in front of his own house, a neat two-story deal with a screened porch and new brick garage in the rear.

Again he read my mind, told me, "I lucked up on mill stock when it was rock bottom, years ago, and sold some shares to buy my house. No better investment than a decent home."

Edna Williams was a quiet woman with fat legs and a nice smile. They had two boys of five and fourteen, and nobody seemed surprised to meet Jim's cousin. After a heavy meal, the boys went upstairs and Edna remained in the kitchen while Jim and I watched TV, mostly Canadian shows. He finished a pint of whiskey while I kept to a can of beer.

At 9:30 Jim returned to the police station for a last wrap-up, dropping me off at my hotel. I wrote Martha a short letter saying the job was going to be a dull snap, then went to sleep.

I awoke at 6 a.m. as usual, then dozed off again. There wasn't anything worth getting out of bed for in Mattonville. I finally dressed at ten and had coffee and eggs at the bar downstairs, the bartender casually asking what I was doing in town.

I told him I was Jim William's cousin from Syracuse and he didn't believe it. As I walked toward the police station a tall, gray-

haired man, a Minister, wearing a worn black suit, stopped me and held out his hand. His face was weather-beaten.

"Welcome, stranger," he said. "I'm Father George Davis. My church is the only House of God in this feudal town and open to people of any faith." His deep voice projected like a punch.

"Thanks," I said, shaking his hand, and watching one of their fine squad cars cruise along the main street. "I doubt if I'll be here by Sunday. Father, what do you mean by 'feudal' town? I find Mattonville a peaceful city, well-policed."

"I mean the mills literally keep everybody here in serfdom, including your cousin," he added, an actual twinkle in his pale eyes. "When the mills say jump, everybody jumps—except me. I often wish things were as simple as in the old days. I read in the Bible of a wicked ruler and truly wicked he was. Today, I can not actually call the mill officials wicked for they only carry out the decisions of the stockholders, who, in this era of mutual funds, may indeed be innocent little people, unaware of what is happening here.

"Ah, if I could only somehow reach them—explain the need for a union. Understand, sir, I do not believe unions are all good, always right. But we need one here. I'm afraid I must sound confused." He held out his hand again. "Come talk to me anytime you wish, even if our ideas may clash."

"Thanks again. My name is—"

"I know your name, Mr. Bordon," Father Davis said, shaking my hand and walking on.

I was a popular character. Passing the store with THE MILL CRIER in gold letters on the window, I heard my name called. A sharp-faced man of about thirty-three, his crewcut hair and slim gray suit making him seem a refuge from Madison Avenue, stood in the doorway, nervously smoking a pipe.

"I'm Clay Turner, editor of the *Crier,*" he said. "Jim's told me about you, Al, but I'd like to see your police credentials."

"Why?" I asked. "I'm not here as a police officer."

"Stop stalling. That garbage about being Jim's cousin is fine for the yokels, but I saw you talking to Father Davis and considering the explosive labor situation at the mills, I have to be certain you are a police officer, not a union organizer."

"Why do you have to be so certain?"

"My job is to shape opinions against the unions. Come on, Al, let me see your badge."

"I showed Jim Williams my Police Chiefs Association card," I said, turning to walk away. Turner grabbed my sleeve. "Don't do that, Turner!" I warned, pushing his hand away.

"Be careful how you talk to me—" He waved his pipe in my face.

"Stop it, Turner. As far as I'm concerned you've no official standing—no right to check on anybody."

I walked on to the post office, which was also part of one of the two general stores, and mailed my letter to Martha. Then I stopped at the bar on the side street for a second cup of coffee. It was full of idle men. I stood out not only because I was a stranger, but in my old sport jacket I was the sharpest dressed man there. In the Harbor, Martha claims I dress like a broken down clam digger.

The men gazed at me with sour suspicion. One beefy joker mumbled, "We don't need no stoolies." Another guy added, "Even from Washington." It didn't add, but I knew they meant me. I finished my coffee slowly, and took my time leaving.

I started for the police station. A squad car stopped across the street and Jim William's rough face grinned at me from behind the wheel. I walked over and got in. "I was looking for you, Al. Your students have arrived, staying at Willie Akeah's house. Hear you had a run in with Clay Turner. He didn't like the town radical, Father Davis, talking to you."

"A priest is a radical?"

"Well, this has never been much of a church city. The Cleves keep

to their own religion and in the old days the loggers didn't have time for pie in the sky when they came to town. Been tough pickings for a preacher.

"Father Davis took over the church ten years ago, and he seems to be rich enough not to worry about lack of parishioners. Queer old duck. He often preaches a whole sermon attacking the mills, without a soul in the church, or just a couple of old women. Well, guess you want to go out and see the movie makers. I'll drive you there. I never saw a movie being made."

"Thanks, Jim, but I'd rather walk. Have nothing else to do."

"Got a complaint about a pack of dogs, and have to pass the dirt road. I'll let you off there, if you want exercise. But make sure to stay on the road, Al. Timber rattlers out this time of the year."

They were unpacking an old sta-

tion wagon when I reached the Akeah place—big silver reflectors, lights, a small generator. There were three male students, about nineteen to twenty-three years old. Two of them were white and one was a negro dressed in sweat shirts and dungarees. They were all compactly built, with serious faces. The negro had a holster of tools strapped to his waist and was busy tinkering with the station wagon's generator.

Barbara Laker's long face was interesting, with dark blue, intense eyes under shaggy-cut blonde hair. In a sweater and faded stretch pants she showed a tall figure, slim waist and a mild bosom.

The only way to describe Nancy Akeah was to call her 'cute.' Shorter than Barbara, she was a plump beauty with wild dark hair, golden skin and lush lips. She could have played a part in any South Seas movie. In time she would probably be stout, but at twenty-one she filled her tight slacks with a basketball behind, firm breasts and a bundle of energetic curves.

Willie Akeah introduced me as Al's cousin and I mentioned something about coming out to fish. Then nodding at the tripods Barbara was putting up, I asked innocently, "You a photographer for a magazine?"

"We're about to make a motion picture dealing with the daily life of the Cleves—as you must know," she added, taking a tripod into the house.

I was puzzled by her abruptness until I realized the students were obviously suspicious of me because I was supposed to be Jim's cousin. I didn't understand why until Nancy Akeah told me, "This film will publicize the injustices done to the Indians, the broken laws and agreements."

"Seems to me if laws and agreements have been broken, you need a lawyer," I said. "Not publicity."

She grinned up at me, dimples on either end of the heavy, warm, red line that was her mouth. "Are you for real, mister? Ask your cousin, Chief Williams—although he probably won't admit it, either. The facts are that not *one* of the several hundred treaties solemnly entered into between the Indian nations and the United States have ever been lived up to! Cleeve children are entitled to a full education in our own language, which we've never received—to cite but one minor injustice.

"According to a treaty signed in eighteen eighty-three, all the timber and mineral rights on the land within fifty miles of here belongs to our tribe. But when the wood was found to be valuable, the U. S. merely 'terminated' the treaty, or in plain words, tore it up because the terms no longer suited them. Don't spout law and order to me, mister. I've known the opposite all my life."

"I believe—and know—that the law is the law," I said. "It can't be ignored by anybody. That's why we have laws."

Her dark eyes opened wide, as if mocking me. "I wish it was like that. In reality the law works one way for the white man, and not at all for the Indian. Like they say, the Pilgrims first fell on their knees to thank the Lord, then fell on the Indians. But, enough soapboxing. I have to work. Perhaps our picture will help people like yourself understand the problem. Perhaps."

Mr. Akeah told me to fish any time I wanted and after hanging around for an hour or so, I walked back to town. I had a lonely supper and a beer in the bar under my hotel room, tried phoning Ed Laker to tell him things were okay. I had to leave a message with his answering service and I had a feeling the local operator was listening in.

The bar was too unfriendly to sit around in, so at eight-thirty p.m. I picked up a Montreal newspaper and went to my room. Roof or no roof, I was sorry I'd come up here. Laker's fears had been silly to start with and I missed Martha, the feel of *my* Harbor. But as I dozed off I told myself to stop thinking like a fool.

IV

THE NEXT MORNING I borrowed a rod and wading boots from Jim Williams, and tried fly-casting for trout, which also let me keep an eye on Miss Laker. They were all running about the Akeah farm like mad, taking shots of this and that, everybody busy-busy shouting about footage, hot spots, and other things which didn't make any sense to me.

I didn't have the patience for fresh water fishing, waiting all day for a single bite. But it was an easy way of doing my job and I fished the following day, too. When I returned to town in the afternoon Clay Turner called me into his store and showed me a copy of *Newstime*.

"I owe you an apology, Al," he said. "You're a cop, all right."

There was the picture they'd taken of me in my office, which made me a little homesick, and a short piece quoting Kipling and me on the law. I wondered if Barbara had read it, but I didn't see any magazines for sale in Mattonville.

Turner said, "Sorry, I gave you a hard time but my job is to keep the union out of this town."

"I thought your job was running the paper?"

Turner gave me a tight grin. "Correct, and the main task of the *Crier* is to make certain organizers don't set foot in town."

"Since when has it been against the law to join a union?" I wanted to know.

"Come on, Bordon, the question isn't one of legality but of dol-

lars. Most of the men automation will displace have worked in the mills for years. With a union, the severence pay alone will come to millions."

"Can the mills afford to pay the men?"

"That's not for me to say," Turner said brightly.

When I returned to town Wednesday afternoon, still troutless, Chief Williams stopped me on the street. "Your students asked permission to shoot some street scenes here tomorrow. Hells bells, isn't Nancy a pretty dish? Left here a pugdy kid but college sure developed her. Students are leaving Friday. I guess you'll be going then, too."

"Did you give them permission?"

He nodded. "It's all right with me, as long as they don't block traffic. Al, before you go, come over for supper again. We'll kill a bottle."

"Thanks. And thanks also for the rod and boots. I won't be needing them anymore."

I went up to my room to wash and shave. It was too early to eat and I walked around town. As I passed the side street bar, a big guy lumbered out and asked, "This what you been looking for, fink?" He let go a roundhouse right.

I took it on my shoulder, grabbed his left arm, spun him around and kicked the back of his knees, forcing him to the ground. He was the same beefy joker who'd made some cracks the first time I'd walked into the bar.

A few of the men came to the doorway and one asked, "Watcha starting something for, Artie?" Then he turned to me. "He's high, didn't mean nothing, mister. He's pretty steamed over the newspaper story."

Somebody in the crowd held up a copy of the *Mill Crier* with a large headline: SUSPECTED RED STUDENTS PHOTOGRAPHING MATTONVILLE! NATIONAL SECURITY POSSIBLY INVOLVED IN UNION PLOT!

I let go of Artie, asked for the paper. Stepping back, keeping an eye on the crowd, I read the story. It was a hell of an inflammatory piece and only based on the fact that one of the students was the son of a minor official in a meat union, while the negro headed his college chapter of the NAACP, which has been called a Red Front organization by several southern state subversive control heads.

Handing the paper back, I walked to the police station. Jim Williams was at his desk and immediately pulled out a bottle. "Want a belt, Al?"

"Have you seen the *Mill Crier?*" I asked.

"Sure. Clay runs a check on newcomers, and he went off the deep end when he found out one of them was the son of a union official."

"Deep end? I'd arrest Turner for inciting to riot!"

"Relax, Al. You're such a law abiding person you wouldn't want me to gag the press, would you?" he asked calmly.

"Then stop them from taking movies in town tomorrow. People are in a nasty mood. A drunk named Artie just jumped me."

"Don't worry, Al, I know how to run my town. I already talked to—"

"Jim, I smell trouble!"

He rubbed his thin hair. "Al, you're always running off at the mouth about law and order. I already talked to Nancy but she claims they need these last few scenes for their movie. From a strict legal view, there's no way I can stop them. I just—"

"Damnit, Jim, by tomorrow the people will be so worked up they'll start a riot."

"Al, this is *my* police station. Let me finish a sentence. There won't be any riot. We've handled ugly crowds before—real ugly ones. Let the students take their goddamn movies. If I see the situation is getting the least out of hand, I'll order them to stop taking pictures. Most likely they'll refuse. You know how college kids are.

"Okay, so I arrest them, keep them here overnight, for their own protection. Friday morning they'll get a fast trial, and have to pay a small fine for disorderly conduct. They plan to leave Friday anyway, and it's all over."

"I'll try talking to Barbara, the others, explain the situation."

Jim poured a drink. "That will only make them more bullheaded. That nosey Father Davis has already told them he'll be with them tomorrow. Al, take a drink and relax. There won't be any rumble tomorrow. The *Crier* runs a scare headline every few weeks. And my men will be ready, even with tear gas, at the first sign of trouble. You surprise me. I never figured you to be so jittery."

"I'll skip the booze. About this Artie—"

"Hells bells, Al, if I collared him now it would only add fuel to things. I know my job, believe me, even if magazines don't write me up," he added with a grin. "Just relax, and get a good night's sleep."

Leaving the police station I walked to the church, a tiny building with a dirty white steeple at the edge of town. I found Father Davis eating supper, alone, in the frame parish house next door.

When I suggested he talk the students out of taking movies in town tomorrow he smiled and asked, "Mr. Bordon, who are you, really? Jim Williams never mentioned any relatives outside Mattonville. You've been here for almost a week, obviously bored. Folks can't decide whether you're a company spy, a Federal agent, or even a union undercover man."

"Father, I'm spending my vacation here," I said. "That's the truth. I'm not an agent of any kind. I merely don't want to see the students hurt. You can convince them of the danger."

"Take some stew, Mr. Bordon. I'm a fair cook. As a man of God, how can I tell these youngsters who have the right, including a permit, to take their pictures, to back down before Turner's wild lies? While there is a far larger union movement here than the mills know, and the men don't want it brought into the open yet by these students, I don't expect trouble."

"If it comes, can Chief Williams and his men handle it?"

He gave me a sad smile. "I dislike speaking evil of your 'cousin,' but Jim can handle matters without brutality if he's sober, and if drunk, by nightstick rule. One reason I'm joining the young people tomorrow, aside from believing they have the right to complete their film is to protect them.

"Despite the smallness of my flock in some curious way I do command respect. The only riot talk I've heard is from your lips. I suggest you stop such talk. It could very easily plant such thoughts in others. Or is that your reason for being so interested?"

"My sole reason is that of a citizen who believes in law and order!" I snapped, walking out.

I considered phoning Ed Laker. Perhaps he could talk Barbara into leaving at once. But I doubted that, and after supper, as I walked around Mattonville, I saw no special signs of tension. I visited both bars and was treated as the usual 'outsider.' Perhaps I was worrying too much and even if I disliked Jim's leaning on a bottle, he seemed an efficient enough police chief.

I was up early Thursday morning. After coffee I dropped into the police station at 8 a.m. Jim asked, "Checking up on me, Al? Never saw such a worry-bug. Things are under control, as I told you they would be. They're out at the mills now, taking shots of the men going to work. No trouble at all.

"Around noon they'll drive through town, taking pictures from their car. Then they plan shots of a few Cleeves going in and out of the stores, and the bars, and that's it. They should be finished by three p.m. Oh, the wife wants to know if you like cherry pie?"

"I do. Tell her thanks."

"Meet me here at about five and we'll—" His phone rang and he joked with the operator for a second before he turned back to me. "Long distance for you, Al. Shirley, the operator, saw you walking in here, and didn't bother trying the hotel. Use the phone on the corner desk."

Ed Laker asked, "Al? How's everything?"

"Okay, so far," I told him. "The

local paper red-baited the students yesterday, but there doesn't seem to be any trouble in the wind."

"Red-baiting my daughter? That's comical. Al, the reason I'm phoning is this. Tomorrow, if you can, make sure Barbara reaches Buffalo, either by bus or car, in time to catch the four p.m. plane back to New York. She knows we expect her, but since she's sailing at noon on Saturday, I want to make certain she's on that plane."

"She will be," I promised him.

"Okay, Al. That takes care of everything, I guess. I'll see you in the Harbor during the week. My boat's in the water; we'll get in some fishing."

Things were running smoothly. Jim was in steady radio contact with his men at the mills and I spent the morning with him, looking at new lightweight handcuffs he'd purchased.

I was on the main street when the students drove through at noon. They had a camera mounted on the roof of the station wagon, with one of the white students running it. Father Davis, Barbara, Nancy, and the other two students were inside the car.

One of Jim Williams' squad cars cruised ahead of them, and he had two men on foot patrol. There wasn't any tension in the air, merely curiosity, with most people waving at the camera.

The police held back the small crowd as shots were taken of the Indians entering and emerging from several stores. At the side-street bar, Barbara asked a few of the men watching on both sides of the street if they would walk in and out of the bar instead of just standing there staring at the camera.

A sallow-faced youth in a sweater and overalls put his hands on his hips as he strutted in front of the camera, yelling, "You think Hollywood will give me a contract?"

One of the men across the street shouted, "Union punks! They're just here to make trouble."

Two men raced across to get him. I moved in, certain real trouble was coming. But Jim and his police handled it smoothly, pushing everybody back. Then Jim Williams told the students that there would be no more shooting, that it might start a riot.

Barbara Laker said, "But we have a permit to—"

"In view of the situation, miss, that's cancelled. Now just pack up and leave town," Jim told her softly.

"And if we don't?" Barbara asked.

"I'll arrest you for refusing to obey a police order. I might take you all in under protective custody anyway—for your own safety."

Father Davis stepped out of the car to argue in a low, but clear voice about the meaning of Students Against Violence, while Bar-

bara Laker and Nancy Akeah whispered with the negro student.

Finally Nancy said, "We are going to finish our movie, Mr. Williams. We only have another half hour's work and if we don't finish it now, we never will."

Jim Williams shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, you're all under arrest for disturbing the peace. Now get in your station wagon and follow my car to the station house. No tricks."

The student on the car roof still was taking pictures, and I wondered if they considered this a publicity gimmick, ending their movie with shots of themselves being arrested.

The crowd was getting noisy. I couldn't decide if they were for or against the arrests, but the two police officers had things under control and were moving the men on. Only I wouldn't have allowed them to move back into the bar.

When I reached the police station, Jim waved at me from behind his desk. He already had his bottle out. "No fuss, no trouble, see? I'll hold 'em overnight and tomorrow Judge Henry will be over to fine 'em a few bucks and out they go."

"You handled the situation well."

He gave me a big grin, showing all his bad teeth. Maybe they didn't have a dentist in Mattonville: I couldn't remember even seeing a doctor's office. "I run a tight town, Al, because I got an efficient police force for openers. How about a drink?"

"No, thanks," I said.

"You're a real live one, Al, don't drink, smoke, and all the time you been here alone, you never even asked for any action. I have some paper work to do but if you'll come back in about two hours we'll go home, and pack away some grub."

I walked over to the public general store, long-distanced Laker and told him what had happened. He said, "Arrested? Couldn't you have prevented that, Al?"

"Ed, they did break the law by refusing to move on. Things are well in hand here but the safest place Barbara can be is in jail."

"Well, I suppose it's an experience for Barbara. Al, often these college kids refuse to pay the fine. Matter of principle, you see. If they should try that in the morning, you pay Barbara's fine and bring her back to New York. She is still leaving for Europe on Saturday."

"Will do," I promised.

"Please phone me tomorrow, soon as you're on your way."

I wanted to bring Jim's wife a present. All the boxed candy looked dusty, so I finally bought some toilet water. Although the *Mill Crier* was out with a headline screaming, UNION RADICALS RIOT ON STATE STREET! the town seemed back to normal.

But when I'd washed up and

changed my shirt, and went to meet Jim he told me, "I'll have to skip supper, Al. There's been a little trouble—a fist fight between some men and a couple of Cleeves out at the saw mill, and talk about going to the reservation. Probably only hot air but I'm sticking around here. Of course, you can go to my house and eat with the wife and kids. I trust you." He winked.

His bottle was almost empty but except for his bloodshot eyes Jim seemed sober enough. I said, "That would only put them to unnecessary bother. What time will the trial be held tomorrow?"

"County judge will open court at about ten a.m. Court is held in the mayor's office, which is above the newspaper store. Bert Dill, a mill foreman, is mayor this year. Things will be over by noon."

I returned to the post office to pick up the Buffalo bus schedule, had supper in the bar under my room—the men there were joking about being movie actors now—and went up to my room early. I'd decided to give the toilet water to Martha.

In the morning I packed my light bag, and paid my bill. The mayor's office was a surprisingly large room and, except for two old women and Willie Akeah, I was the only spectator. The judge was a conservatively dressed middle-aged man and the elderly court clerk was also the stenographer. Two police officers brought the students in. They all looked haggard. Father Davis' weatherbeaten face seemed pale.

The hearing was short. Jim Williams testified he had ordered the students to stop taking pictures, as he felt there might be a riot. They had refused and he had arrested them. Father Davis, acting as their spokesman, said the students had not started any disorder. Judge Henry said it was for the police to decide whether law and order had been placed in jeopardy, found them all guilty and fined them twenty-five dollars each or five days in jail.

Father Davis was given a suspended sentence. The students refused to pay their fines but when Barbara's turn came, I stepped forward and paid, saying I knew her father. She was furious and wouldn't leave until Nancy Akeah held a whispered conference with her.

When I got her outside she asked, "Just who the hell are you?"

"I'm the Police Chief of Bay Harbor, up here on a vacation. I phoned your father and he asked me to pay your fine. He wants you back in New York to catch the boat for Europe tomorrow. I have the bus ticket."

"I'm not going to Europe!" There was a note of hysteria in her voice.

"You tell that to your folks. I'll get a car and pick up your bags.

There's a plane leaving Buffalo at three forty-five."

"So you're a policeman! Do you know what's happened here?"

"I was there," I told her, looking around main street. I doubted if Mattonville had a taxi. I'd get Jim Williams to drive us out. "You don't rate any special privileges because you're students with a 'cause.' A police officer told you to move, you refused and were arrested. I would have done the same thing in the Harbor. The law is for everybody and not—"

"Nancy Akeah was raped!"

I stared at her, shocked, unbelieving.

"How could she have been. She was in jail all night?"

"That drunken beast, Jim Williams, made the two of us strip. He claimed he was looking for drugs, and then he attacked Nancy!"

I continued to stare at Barbara. If her voice was hysterical, her eyes weren't. I heard myself ask, "And you?"

She shook her blonde head. "I —I was unwell."

"If this is your way of getting back at Chief Williams . . ." Her eyes met mine unwaveringly. I forced myself to speak sternly. "Let me hear this again. Are you saying a police chief raped a prisoner?"

"I said it, didn't I? I'll swear out an affidavit, if that will carry any weight in this company town!"

I walked her to Father Davis' house. He was surprised to see us and I motioned for him to come into the kitchen. When I told him what Barbara had said he was speechless.

"Father," I snapped, "is this true or some publicity stunt?"

"I can't truthfully say. I was locked in a storage room all night. I know the negro youth was beaten when the students started to sing and the police ordered them to be quiet. I can state that Williams was drunk. Needless to add, molesting Indian girls isn't unknown around here but I can't honestly state whether Nancy was attacked."

I called Barbara into the kitchen. "Did you actually witness the rape?"

"Yes! I was in the same cell. The boys were in another cell."

"Why didn't Nancy say anything about this in court?"

"We all felt the court wouldn't believe us. But when I reach New York, SAV headquarters will hold a press conference and—"

"Will you swear, before Father Davis, that you saw Nancy Akeah raped by Chief Williams?" I cut in.

"I swear it!"

"What about the other police officers?"

"They all saw it. Williams said Nancy was a little tramp who wouldn't withhold her favors from any police officer. But they were afraid they'd get in trouble if they believed him . . . There's your

law and order! But I can assure you Williams won't get away with—"

"Come on, we're going to see Jim Williams."

Barbara drew back, terror on her long face. "You cops stick together, don't you?"

Father Davis said, "I refuse to let this girl return to the police station unless I go along."

"You'd better stay here, Father," I said. "Nothing is going to happen to her in the police station! You can trust me to take care of Jim Williams."

"You can't do anything alone. You won't stand a chance."

"Father, I've no intention of breaking the law," I told him. "I'm going to enforce it! Barbara, will you come with me?"

TWO OFFICERS were at the front desk, and Jim Williams was reading a report in his office. He waved at me. "Thought you'd be on the bus with the girl, Al."

"Chief Williams, I want to see Nancy Akeah."

"Why? Paying her fine, too? You the last of the big spenders?"

"Miss Laker swears you raped Miss Akeah."

He jumped to his feet, his rough face flushed. "Al, that's a goddamn lie!"

"Let me hear Miss Akeah confirm that," I said just as two other officers appeared in the open doorway.

Jim Williams roared, "All you'll hear is my foot booting your can out of here! You've been a lousy pain in my prat all week, walking about with your fat nose up in the air. Hell's bells, what kind of a cop are you, taking the word of a broad living with Indians?"

Keeping my eyes on Jim Williams, I called over my shoulder to the two officers. "Did you witness the rape?"

"No rape," one of them said. "The Indian babe got ideas as she undressed, and asked Jim to—"

"Shut up!" Williams roared, reaching for his billy, and coming at me. Backing toward the wall I said, "Jim Williams, I'm placing you under *citizen's arrest* for rape and I am also arresting the other members of your police for aiding and abetting a felony."

There was a sudden silence in the office. Jim Williams stood shock still, mouth open. "Have you gone crazy, Al? You weren't even here last night, you can't make a charge like that without—"

"You'd better read up on your law, Jim. I don't have to witness the crime. Not when I can produce a witness."

Williams swung his billy then. I dropped to the floor, kicking his ankles out from under him. Williams came down on top of me, but I rolled him over, and took his gun away from him. Jumping to my feet, I covered the two officers standing in the doorway. "Drop your guns or I'll also charge you with resisting arrest!"

As Barbara stared at me, her lips drained of all color, they tossed their guns on the floor. I told them to lie down, kicked the guns away, and cuffed the three men. Racing over, I locked the front door, ad closed the inner steel riot door.

Jim Williams was trying to rub his ankles as he shouted, "You fool! You'll never get away with this!"

"Shut up!" I said. I took a tear-gas gun and a sub-machine gun from the wall locker, loaded them.

Barbara asked, "Are you going to release the others? They can help you."

"No, they belong in a cell. Stay in that chair, out of the way."

I went over to a cell where Nancy was sitting on a cot, and asked if she had been raped. She looked away until Barbara called out, "Nancy, tell him what happened!"

"Yes, I was attacked by Chief Williams," the girl whispered.

"Why didn't you tell the court this?"

"An Indian wouldn't be believed in that court."

The desk phone rang. I walked over and picked up the receiver, and put it down again. As I dialed the operator, the radio board was buzzing. I asked the operator to give me State Trooper Headquarters in the capital. A Sergeant Anderson answered.

I told him, "My name is Alvin Bordon. I'm up in Mattonville. I've just made a citizen's arrest of Police Chief Williams for rape and of two of his men for aiding a felony. I'm holding them in the police station. I'll only surrender my prisoners to State Troopers from outside this county. Have you got that, Sergeant?"

"Now wait, is this some—?"

"Did you hear what I told you, Sergeant Anderson?"

"Yes. I'll have Troopers there," he said.

Hanging up, I gave the operator Ed Laker's office number. Seconds later he asked, "Al? On your way to the city?"

"No. I'm in the Mattonville police station. Nancy Akeah was raped by the police chief, Barbara was a witness to the crime. I've just placed him and two of his men under citizen's arrest."

"You what? My God, was Barbara—?"

"No. She's here in the police station with me. Listen, Ed, hell may break out soon. I want you to contact the wire services, and tell them what's happened. I've already phoned the State Troopers, said I'll surrender my prisoners to them. But I want the press around, if possible, to be on the safe side."

"Al, have you gone crazy? Why is Barbara in the police station with you? You're endangering my daughter's life! Why the hell did you start—?"

"A girl was raped, the law broken. You contact the wire services damn fast!" I hung up.

As I was closing the steel shutters over the narrow windows, somebody banged on the door. Through a gun slit I saw one of Jim's officers standing there, a swiftly gathering crowd watching him.

Using a bull horn I said, "My name is Alvin Bordon. I've made a citizen's arrest of Chief Williams for rape. I'm hereby placing you under citizen's arrest for aiding a felony and—"

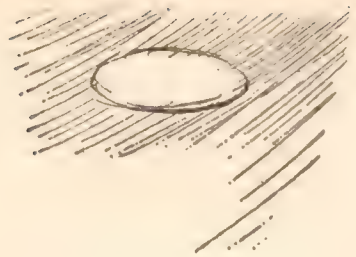
He got off a shot at the window. Dropping the horn I fired a burst into the air with the sub-machine gun. He ran, the crowd scattered. Placing the tear-gas gun beside the window, I kicked a chair over, and made certain I had an extra clip for the Thompson.

Then I sat down and waited. Mattonville was deathly quiet.

Next Month:

THE SLEEPER CAPER—A THRILLING *SHELL SCOTT* STORY

By RICHARD S. PRATHER



The card-sorting machine was never idle. Night and day it clicked out data on armed and dangerous men. "Watch," it seemed to whisper, "for the killer pattern. Stay alert and on guard."

TELETYPE

by WILL F. JENKINS

BOB CALLAHAN'S brother-in-law Timmy Burns came out of the west in a stolen automobile, which seemed to have nothing at all to do with punched-card machines or teletypes or pins with fancily colored heads stuck into large-scale maps. But it did. The first card was punched with information about Timmy when he went to jail, and there were other holes punched in it on later occasions. The teletype machines were actuated by events following his release. Some teletype memos caused the extravagantly tinted pins to be stuck into the map.

Callahan and his wife, Jeanne, of course, did not know about any of this. Their first information came one night while they watched the eleven o'clock television news before going to bed. The children were already sound asleep. There was quite a lot on the newscast about the Suffolk holdup and murder of three days before, including pictures of the victim's widow and children.

Callahan and Jeanne felt sorry for those people, who had done nothing to merit disaster. But then the television went on to show pictures of the first test flight of a new jet plane. And Callahan and Jeanne watched, letting the Suffolk robbery slip from their minds. Naturally they did not think about Timmy.

A long distance away, a card-sorting machine prosaically ran thousands of square-punched bits of pasteboard under groping, metal fingers. This was at State Police headquarters.

From time to time, abruptly, a card would pop out of the flowing mass. A teletype absent-mindedly clocked down the information that this man, description so-and-so,

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was wanted for abandoning his family. This boy, aged fourteen, had run away from home. A certain burglar was believed to be operating in a specific area. A filling-station operator had been killed during a holdup, apparently as he tried to telephone an alarm.

Identical memos appeared in many diverse places. Teletypes duplicated, click by click, each one. In some places a particular item caused action. In others the action consisted only of reading the item into a microphone, for far-ranging gray troopers' cars to pick up.

But always each item of information was ultimately put onto a punched card, which could be filed and found by the card machines, and its information decoded or added to.

It was just after eleven o'clock that night when Callahan heard a car drawing up to the curb before his house. It stopped. Jeanne cocked an ear toward the sound. Someone slammed a car door outside. Jeanne was in the act of rising when the doorbell rang.

She went out into the hall. The only sound, then, was the mellifluous voice of the news announcer, continuing. Of course Callahan heard Jeanne's footsteps on the floor. He heard her turn the doorknob. He heard her stifled exclamation. A moment later she reappeared in the living-room doorway. She was deathly white.

"Bob! It's Timmy," she said through stiff lips.

Callahan did not quite grasp it for a moment. Then he rose slowly, his expression growing dogged. Timmy Burns came into the room with his shoulders squared. He looked sharp. He wore new clothes. They were expensive. They were elaborately pressed. He always had sharp-edged creases in his trousers, and he scorned the kind of haberdashery that Callahan wore.

Timmy grinned. He was ostentatiously at ease.

Callahan said in a flat voice, "You made a break, Timmy? And you expect us to hide you? It wouldn't be a good idea, you know."

"You pain me, Bob," said Timmy. The tone did not suit him; he was just a little over twenty. "You hurt my feelings. No, it isn't a break. Haven't you ever heard of parole boards? They shook their fingers at me and told me not to be naughty any more. So I'm out."

He moved negligently, and it was additionally evident that his shirt was high-priced, and his necktie expensive. Timmy had a gift for making such matters clear.

"You undoubtedly have proof of that," said Callahan without heat. "Mind letting me see it?"

Timmy grinned again, triumphantly. He reached into his pocket and brought out a folded document. He put it in Callahan's hand.

"You're so cynical!" he said chidingly.

Callahan read the document slowly, while the television set, in a series of eight-second flashes, displayed and recited the virtues of dog food, a deodorant, and a forthcoming boxing match.

He handed the document back to Timmy. "It's a parole, all right," he said evenly. "We didn't know it was going to happen so soon."

Jeanne looked sick, standing in the doorway. Callahan knew what she was thinking. The children. They went to school now. They knew that they had an Uncle Timmy, but they never asked questions about him. He was only a name. But Timmy had been involved in a very nasty business back in Canton. There had been a trial, and Timmy had called Jeanne as a witness to an alibi he'd tried to establish, and she had told the truth. She'd slanted it to favor Timmy, but he'd needed perjury.

So he'd gone to prison with his three partners. The four of them had posed and postured self-consciously during their trial. Callahan hated them horribly. They were fools, of course, but it is hard not to hate fools when they hurt your wife and children.

"You've prospered," Callahan said in the same flat voice. "I don't want to know how. Why did you come here?"

"To see my dear sister," said Timmy, grinning broadly, "who tried so hard to help me be a good little boy!"

The muscles of Callahan's jaw bunched. Then he opened his mouth to speak—and shrugged his shoulders instead. You can talk to a man who listens to hear what you say. If you tell him something sensible, he may act on it. But Timmy listened only for a chance to score wittily in reply. He admired himself very much indeed, did Timmy Burns.

"Cut it!" Callahan snapped. "What do you want?"

"I need some gas for my car," said Timmy. "Is that too big a flavor to ask?"

"I'll buy you gas," Callahan said. "I'll give you eating money to

get along with too, if that's what you want."

"It isn't," said Timmy. "I can buy gas. I've got a swell car. Big. Yellow. Two-eighty horsepower. Special trim. Best car I ever had."

Callahan looked at him. Timmy grinned. "I—borrowed it," he explained. "Cops are looking for it. Nosy guys, cops!"

Callahan ground his teeth. There is no law that insists a man must help his brother-in-law because of loyalty to his wife. But a man will do much to keep his children from learning about an uncle —their mother's brother—who at least once has grinned triumphantly in a prisoner's dock because he has risen from the distinction of delinquency to the eminence of adult crime.

"In fact," said Timmy, brightly, "last time I went to get some gas, the guy there looked at the license plates too long. I started to drive away and he ducked inside his place. I went back and he was telephoning. I—stopped him."

Jeanne caught her breath. Callahan said harshly: "You're stuck, then. There'll be roadblocks, eh? So you came here to be caught? Figured I'd have to get you out of it?"

Timmy beamed. Callahan swore softly. Jeanne tried to speak, but Callahan knew what she'd say. He tightened his lips. "Don't worry, Jeanne. I'm going to get him away, damn him!"

Far away, the machine that swiftly felt the faces of punched cards passing through it ejected one card, and another, and two more, and still another. A man picked them up and took them to a teletype. They constituted a memo and list of names and addresses.

There had been some serious crimes, which had culminated in the theft of a rich man's ostentatious car. There had been the Suffolk holdup and murder. And now there had been something else—a filling-station holdup and the killing of the filling-station attendant.

The card-sorting machine had gone through thousands of punched cards, looking for individual cards with highly individual combinations of punches. It had found a total of a dozen. The cards said—the punched-holes did —that the wanted man was most probably one of a dozen named men.

The crimes, taken together, had certain aspects that were like signatures. A painter can be identified by his brushwork, and a writer by his style. A holdup man's work has certain mannerisms, certain distinctive features, by which an expert of a business machine can determine the 'school' of craftsmen to which he belongs. Often he can be identified outright. It is the method of an art critic applied electronically to crime. The machine had felt thousands of cards, successively, with tiny metal fin-

gers. It announced an opinion: one of these dozen men was guilty.

This opinion went on teletype to many towns and cities. Those near the home addresses of the dozen suspects took action.

In the living room of his house, Callahan stuffed a pair of heavy gloves into the pocket of his coat and then patted Jeanne's shoulder comfortingly. "It's all right. It's all right. I'm in no danger. Timmy's a fool, but not a big enough fool to do me any harm."

"You're wrong," said Timmy. "I'm no fool. You're just the same as anybody else to me. If anything goes wrong—"

He stared menacingly at Callahan. His eyes were ugly. "If you got any idea of crossing me up," Timmy went on, in sudden shrillness, "you forget it. She crossed me up, once—my own sister told on me on the witness stand! If she'd said what I told her to, I wouldn't have spent two years where I did. You better not cross me up!"

Callahan ignored the threat. He led the way out of the house.

It was quite dark outside. The town of Bainbridge had street lights, but there were not enough of them to make any considerable glare in the sky. There were only one or two lighted windows visible from Callahan's front porch. It was nearly midnight now, and there was practically no traffic.

The car outside Callahan's door was yellow and big. It was shiny. It was luxurious. And it was stolen. It was not a car to steal for resale. It was not even a good getaway car. But it was the sort of car that went with Timmy's very sharp clothes. It gave a dramatic impression of prosperity and importance. When a very young man drove it, to innocent eyes it would seem that he must be very rich indeed.

Callahan regarded it sardonically. "You must believe in advertising," he said dryly. "You couldn't attract more attention to yourself if you painted a sign on it, saying, 'Look at me!' "

But Timmy was mollified by what he considered admiration. "It's a nice car," he said defensively. "You'll never have a car like this!"

"True," said Callahan. "Too true. But if the cops know you like I do, they won't bother trying to catch you. All they'll have to do is wait for you to clamor for their attention. And that's your safety, right now. They'll never look for you on a bus."

Timmy grimaced. But as they approached the car its flashiness gave him confidence. He strutted as he drew near it. He got into it with an air of grandeur. Callahan got in on the other side. Timmy gunned the motor before he put it in gear. Had anybody been about, they would have had to turn to look.

Callahan's jaw muscles tightened. He had no valid excuse for what he was doing; Timmy was unquestionably a criminal. But Callahan had two school-age children asleep upstairs in the house. He'd do a lot for them.

The streets of Bainbridge were dark and cold and deserted. As they drove, the clock in the town hall struck twelve times, slowly and sonorously. There were no other sounds.

Timmy repeated boastfully, as he drove: "You'll never have a car like this!"

"Agreed," Callahan said curtly. "Now listen. The bus gets here at twelve ten. It stops five minutes and then it goes on. I've offered you money for eating and fare—"

"You offering me money," Timmy said. "That's a joke!"

"There aren't often any passengers for the bus," Callahan went on as curtly as before. "You'll go in the waiting room. Better go into the men's room and wait there. Wait till the bus stops. Give it a minute more for passengers to get off and go away. Then come out and get on board."

Timmy said humorously, "That's good, that is. Me riding on a bus!"

"Exactly," said Callahan. "It's not your type of trick. Now, the bus won't be brightly lighted. People like to sleep at night. Get on, pay your fare—with small bills—and pick a seat by yourself and lie back and doze, or seem to. Don't call attention to yourself. Believe it or not, Timmy, just wanting people to look at you is what's got you into all the trouble you've ever been in. Lay off this time."

Timmy said nothing. A car went across the road ahead, blocks away. Timmy watched it with a certain sudden tensity. The car kept going. Callahan felt almost sorry for Timmy. But not quite. Timmy was a fool. He craved things, notice above all. At all times and in all places.

Timmy would always act upon one single principle, of doing what was most satisfying to him at the moment. Usually it involved securing for himself the undivided emotional attention of other people. A holdup was an orgy of such notice. Being watched, fearfully or fascinatedly or admiringly, was more important to Timmy than anything else in the world—much more important than the consequences of the attention-getting act, especially the consequences to anybody else. But Timmy was perfectly sane. It was simply the way he was.

Now Timmy said suddenly, "You and Jeanne are going to tell the cops I was here."

"If they ask us, yes," Callahan said evenly. "Not otherwise. We're not likely to brag you're Jeanne's brother."

Timmy snarled. "No? I told some friends of mine about Jeanne

being a witness against me. Know what they advised me to do?"

"I can guess," said Callahan coldly. "Turn right at the next corner. The bus station's two blocks down."

"You cross me," Timmy said with venom, "and some of my friends who'll be getting out presently—they'll come see you. Understand?"

"Yes," said Callahan. He felt sick. Timmy could be right.

"You get it?" Timmy insisted ferociously. "You got a good stunt for me, sure. But if it's got a trick in it, you better tell me now. If anything happens to me, just remember that my friends got no use for your kind, or for Jeanne. I told 'em plenty about her. My own sister, sending me to the pen!"

Callahan knew with precision that Timmy was scared. Because he was scared, he was dangerous. Timmy's notion of action was grandiloquent action, dramatic stuff. To act like an ordinary person was unnatural to him. Even to think about it made him uneasy. He had a picture of himself as a glamorous figure, and he had to live up to that picture or he didn't feel right.

Now Timmy Burns had to sing small. Discussing his conduct with Callahan didn't even make him look smart. He was getting panicky because he had to take direction from somebody else, and the direction had no grand gesture in it.

"There's the bus station ahead," said Callahan coldly. "You'll get on the bus and nobody'll suspect you. Lie back in your seat and don't call attention to yourself, and you'll be hundreds of miles away by daybreak. Get off somewhere and take another bus. I don't want to know where you change.

"But listen to me. When you eat, eat in a diner. Don't show more than a couple of dollars. When you take another bus, don't flash a big bill. Don't show off! Let people ignore you! If you'll do that for just three or four days, you can cross the country and get where the police won't dream of looking for you."

It was true. It was profoundly

practical advice, for Timmy. It was better advice than Callahan knew, because he knew nothing of the punched cards that contained a strictly detached analysis of Timmy's methods of operation, based on the sort of person Timmy was. Callahan reflected dryly that it was quaint that he could give a crook good advice. If he were a crook himself he was quite sure he would inevitably act the fool.

The shiny, purring yellow car approached the bus station, which looked singularly desolate. It was brightly lighted enough but there was nobody in it, and the newsstand inside was closed. It was a glaringly lighted empty room, with green paint on the walls and unused benches inside, an oasis of light in the midst of night.

At the edge of the lighted area about the bus station, a parked car waited. It was a late-model sedan, big and black and glistening, with white-walled tires. A car like this, parked in a city, would at least be stripped of its custom upholstery before dawn. In a small town like Bainbridge, though, it was safe enough. It waited for somebody, beside the bus station. The headlights of Timmy's car swept over it as he came to a smooth stop at the curb.

Callahan hardly noticed the black car. He tapped Timmy's arm. "Now, do as I said," he said grimly, "and you'll vanish as if the earth had swallowed you. You've only to let yourself be ignored, and you'll be all right. And when you do start to show off again—and you will—and the cops do catch you, you'll be much more admired if you don't tell anybody your brother-in-law told you how to get away. Let your friends think you were the smart one. Leave Jeanne and me out!"

Timmy stared ahead. Then he turned and grinned at Callahan. "If you think you got me tricked," he said with bright eyes, "you better think again. If you try, you'll get yours—and Jeanne too. But —" He paused and then grinned more widely. "Have fun. It'll be the only time in your life you'll ever drive a car like this!"

He got out. Callahan slid into the driver's seat. He pulled the pair of gloves from his pocket and put them on. He drove the big yellow car away.

At State Police headquarters, a teletype clicked. A man with a green eyeshade took a sheaf of reports and went over to a map that covered all of one wall. Consulting the papers in his hands, he began to stick pins into the map: blue pins for this, red pins for that, parti-colored pins here and there.

Little paper tickets under the pins carried dates. A linkage between certain burglaries in a certain city became obvious as the man inserted pins. A buglar was working the city very systematically, burglarizing on Thursday nights only. For reasons individual to himself, and of which he was probably unconscious, the spots he burglarized could be seen to follow a pattern. He thought it was a pattern of unpredictability. But there would be an extra number of police about a certain four-block neighborhood next Thursday night. The burglar was almost certain to be caught red-handed.

A pin for a filling-station holdup

went into position. There was violence, murder. But the murder had not been planned; details proved that. It had not been planned at all. The filling station operator had been killed because he'd tried to telephone.

This fact tied in precisely with other facts: a stolen yellow car sighted in a town a hundred miles from Suffolk, by someone unable to reach a telephone at the time; and then, another filling station; and finally, from just over the border of the next state, a third report on the yellow car.

A man on the lam can't run too low on gas. He doesn't dare—especially in a big, rich-man's car that gulps down fuel. The line of flight of the yellow car was established: it would pass through a town named Bainbridge.

That fact, with others was noted on a card machine, which patiently ran its tiny metal fingers over innumerable punched cards. The machine reacted violently to facts the cards revealed. An operator interrupted other teletype business to put a special item on the wire. And to make sure, somebody telephoned long-distance . . .

WHEN CALLAHAN got back to his house, there was a gray car in front of the door. It was three o'clock in the morning then, and the lights in Callahan's house were burning brightly, except upstairs where the children slept. Callahan was weary from unaccustomed walking, but when he saw the gray car's tail-lights his breath left him and his heart began to pound. He ran.

When he reached the front door he was panting and sweating and deadly pale. Jeanne opened the door and clung to him, sobbing.

"What happened?" Callahan demanded hoarsely. "You're all right? The kids? What happened?"

"I was scared!" Jeanne gasped. "You didn't come back. I didn't know what might have happened!"

There was a stirring in the living room. A state trooper said politely: "It looked pretty bad. I got sent here, Mr. Callahan. There's an alarm out for a guy they want to question about that Suffolk holdup killing. This guy was paroled about three weeks ago and went right back in business—his kind of business."

Callahan drew in a deep breath. Jeanne said faintly. "They—they think Timmy did it, Bob."

The trooper said comfortingly. "The punched-card machines at headquarters said that Mrs. Callahan was a witness against him when he was sent up. He was due to come through this town. And guys like that—"

"He's her brother," Callahan said bitterly.

The trooper said awkwardly, "Sure, but a guy that starts off delinquent and graduates to holdups and such gets so that sort of thing

don't matter much to him. He gets proud that he's different from other people. He likes to prove it. And if he was coming through this town, why, he might try to—get even. Even with his sister. So I was sent here to make sure you people would be all right. The things we can't figure out ahead we can't do much about. But things like that—"

Callahan said harshly: "He didn't try to get even. He was here. I didn't know what he'd done, but I guessed something. I didn't want him caught here and my family exposed to all the publicity there was last time. I headed him away."

The trooper nodded. "Yeah. She told me. We got to allow for things like that. People hate to turn in brothers and sisters and such. It's human. Anyhow, he's gone. I guess you people are safe enough now."

Incredibly, he did not seem to want to ask any more questions. He prepared to depart. Callahan went to the door with him. There the trooper beckoned, and Callahan followed him outside. It was singularly peaceful now. There were stars. Callahan noticed them for the first time tonight.

The trooper said, "Listen. Your wife—she's a nice woman. You've got to allow for things like that. She tried to kid me. Said you'd taken this guy to the bus station. Said he was heading south on the bus. She was scared he'd kill you. She was pretty desperate. Wanted to get me away from here. I don't blame her. She had to think of her kids and you."

Callahan swallowed.

"You don't have to tell me," said the trooper apologetically. "It's human for you not to want publicity. But—which way did he really go? You'd better get that guy off your neck. Your wife needn't know you told me anything. But that guy's got to be caught. Holdups in themselves would just put him on the wanted list. But he panics and kills people, and that puts him on the 'armed and dangerous' list."

Callahan said in an extremely flat and emotionless voice: "He rode around, gloating about how smart he was, and then he dumped me a couple of miles out on Route One Thirty-eight. He's headed south."

It was a lie. Callahan told it so that Timmy wouldn't be caught while following his—Callahan's—directions, and so Timmy's friends wouldn't feel that Callahan had betrayed him, and so there wouldn't be another trial with Jeanne called as a witness again.

The trooper nodded. "He was figured for that. Your wife tried hard to make me believe he was on a bus. But they got him pretty well figured out at headquarters—personality analysis from the way he's acted. That guy'd never ride on a bus. A big car's his style."

The trooper nodded again. "Un-

derstand. I came here to make sure you people were all right. You didn't have to tell me that. It won't make any difference. We've got roadblocks up to stop him. Thanks."

He went down the walk to his car. He started it quietly and turned it around and drove away.

Callahan went back inside the house. He pulled the pair of gloves from his pocket and threw them away. "Timmy's safe," he said brittlely. "The trooper didn't believe me. He asked me. I told him Timmy headed south on One Thirty-eight. That's where I left his car in a ditch, without any fingerprints on it. They think it's incredible that he should take a bus."

Jeanne began to cry again. And Callahan didn't know whether she wept because in her desperation she'd told the trooper about Timmy, or whether she was desperately relieved that he'd got away. But Callahan knew forlornly that as long as Timmy was at large, he was a constant menace hanging over them.

At half past four in the morning, the teletype clicked a long report. In clipped 'officialese' it reported that a State Police roadblock on Route One Thirty-eight had been crashed by a man in a black sedan with white-walled tires. He saw the waiting troopers. He opened fire as he went through. The troopers returned it. A tire on the sedan went. The car careened and turned over.

The man who'd been expected to be in a big yellow car had been killed in the wreck of a big black car. Fingerprints proved him to be a parolee, three weeks out of prison, wanted for the Suffolk holdup-murder, the killing of the filling-station attendant, and so on. The black car license number such-and-such, which belonged in Bainbridge. The man had jumped the ignition to steal it.

It was all quite impersonal and emotionless. In State Police headquarters, a man in a green eyeshade checked the license number of the black car. It had been reported stolen barely an hour before. It was missing from beside the bus station in Bainbridge.

The teletype clicked an order to cancel all queries on a list of names previously sent out. Some of the Suffolk robbery money had been found on the dead man who had crashed through the roadblock. There were no further questions on the other individuals whose cards had been picked out by the machine.

The man in the green eyeshade ran several cards through the machine. He got a list of the robberies for which he had put pins in the wall-sized map. He very carefully removed the pins, checking each one against the list.

There was just one item left in this matter. It was cleared up

when a big, yellow, expensive car was found in a ditch on Route One Thirty-eight, four miles out of Bainbridge. It appeared that the fugitive had ditched it when it ran out of gas, walked back to Bainbridge, and stolen a black sedan parked by the bus station.

The matter of Callahan's brother-in-law Timmy who came riding out of the west in a stolen car, removed from the list of pending cases.

But the machines did not stop. The teletype clicked. A sixteen-year-old girl had run away from home. A punched card was made to contain the data. A grocery store had been burglarized, with such-and-such individualities of technique. The machines began to sort cards, to identify the man who performed his burglaries in that precise fashion. Presently the teletype clicked . . .

Callahan and Jeanne heard about Timmy's death on the morning news broadcast. Jeanne was dazed—stunned—by the news. It had seemed so certain that Timmy would get away.

"We did all we could for him," Callahan said unhappily. "He had every chance. What more could anybody have done? But I'm sorry, Jeanne."

He comforted her as well as he could, while she wept for Timmy.

MIKE SHAYNE PRESENTS

Next Month's Four Headliners

STRING OF PEARLS by BRETT HALLIDAY
The New Mike Shayne Complete Novelet

THE SLEEPER CAPER by RICHARD S. PRATHER
An Exciting Shell Scott Novelet

SOMETHING LIKE A PELICAN by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER
A Thrilling Lester Leith Novelet

THE HERO by DENNIS LYNDS
A New Slot-Machine Kelly Novelet

TEN MINUTES TO DEATH

by PETER OPPENHEIM

The murderer was sure he'd never be caught and punished. Far too sure . . .

RALPH ALDEN gazed genially across the rough pine table at Leiter Bond. "What your aunt did in effect was rob Leiter to pay Paul," he said. "Family bequeaths of this nature are more common than you might suspect." He chuckled, and the ornate watch charm dangling from a gold chain across his ample middle bobbed up and down.

Leiter Bond managed a smile of polite tolerance. The old bore was a damn capable lawyer and trustee of the Bond estates, but his puns were dull!

Not deigning to notice the lukewarm reception given his far from brilliant play on words, Alden subsided into solemnity. The narrow creases at the corners of his kindly old eyes dissolved, stretched taut across his plump cheeks. His countenance was again the composed mask of the shrewd man of affairs.

"Seriously, my boy, I brought you down here to my camp for a definite purpose. I may be acting

in a somewhat irregular manner. But I know you will be as pleased as I am by your brother's good fortune."

Alden fumbled at the lock of a worn cowhide brief case, and spread a document before him on the table. "This," he said. "is a transcript of your Aunt Clarissa's last will and testament. It was filed in the probate court at Madison, Iowa, last January the twenty-third. She has left her estate to Paul in toto, together with her minority interest in the Bond Iron Works.

"I haven't gone over it in detail yet," Alden continued, after a pause, "but the bequest will total some six hundred thousand dollars. Should your brother die without issue, the inheritance reverts to you. Now, I know that neither of you boys needs money, but—a sum that large has caused dissension in the best of families.

"It never could in our case," Leiter said fervently. "I'm happy for Paul, believe me!"

"Yes, I can see that," the lawyer rambled on. "I thought it of sufficient importance, in fact, to merit a little celebration here tomorrow night. As it happens, I have an engagement in Portland this evening which will prevent me from rejoining you before tomorrow. But I wired your brother, and he is driving up. He should arrive at the site of my old house down the road between eleven and midnight. I want you to meet him there. He'd never be able to locate this place without assistance. Tomorrow we'll spring the good news on him."

Alden rose. "Well, I'd best be going now. I must be in town by seven-thirty . . . Oh, wait!"

The lawyer beckoned Leiter Bond to a window, and together the two men gazed over the ice-clad fastness of Holder's Lake, which tapered from the shore beneath them into the indefinable, pine-hued grandeur which rimmed the horizon.

"Follow me closely, Leiter," the elderly lawyer said. "You can save nearly twelve miles' driving by heading directly across the lake on the ice to that road there—the one that skirts the lake for a mile or so before ascending. See it?"

Leiter Bond followed the other's pointing finger, and noted the rough dirt road which cut a brown scar in the green blanket of the opposite shore. It was a crude affair, hardly more than a passage cut by a succession of summer bathing parties and autumn duck hunters.

"Before you leave to meet Paul," said Alden, "make sure the light in the living room is on. When you return with him, steer a straight course across the lake to the light. In this weather the ice will hold a locomotive. But there are some very active springs at both ends of the lake. They run in

an almost straight line from the road to those two huts."

Ralph Alden pointed along the shore to the right and to the left, and Leiter Bond nodded, his eyes resting briefly on the two small, abandoned shacks.

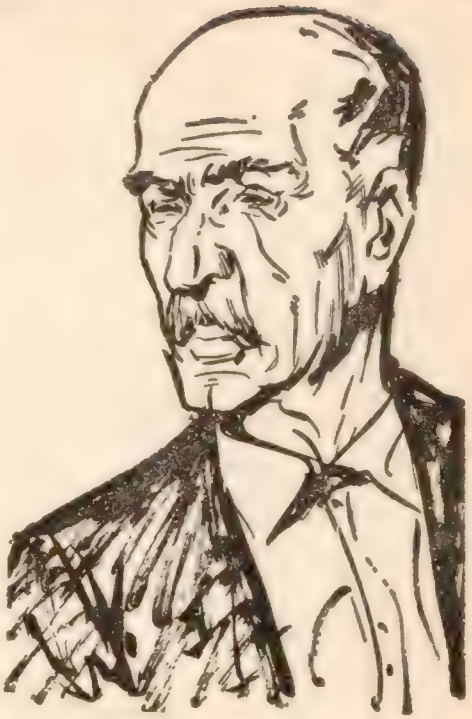
"Oh, it's perfectly safe," the lawyer said, as if aware of Leiter's thoughts. "You have a leeway of two miles. But mind you steer a straight course to the light. The ice above those springs wouldn't bear a hundred pounds in the middle of winter."

A few minutes later the lawyer was gone, and young Leiter Bond watched his big car roll over the frozen track across the lake which saved the tedious trip around the shore. As the car disappeared by the bumpy dirt road on the other side Leiter's dark eyes shifted slowly along the inscrutable level of frozen fastness.

Always it had been that way, he told himself bitterly. Always Paul, whom the gods of fortune seemed to favor. And now Paul was to get the biggest plum of all—his aunt's entire estate. It was unjust, intolerable.

Leiter dropped wearily into a window seat, and stared out through the gloom. It had started to snow. Already the lake and the trees held a compress of whiteness.

A sudden thought brought him to his feet again. What if Paul should disappear—vanish from the face of the earth somewhere along



that route? He, Leiter, would be solvent—his own master. He could tell the merry world to go to hell, and like it.

No one would ever know that he had met his brother at the appointed place, for the snow would obliterate any tire tracks. He could swear that he had waited fruitlessly for hours before giving the alarm.

He threw his cigarette abruptly into the hearth and pulled on his ulster, his lips set in harsh lines.

Ten minutes later he stood beside his car at the edge of the dirt road on the opposite shore of the lake. His thin gold watch lay in the palm of his hand, and he was sighting intently along the dial. It

was intriguing, a kind of game that he was playing for the highest of all possible stakes. Suppose now —just suppose—that the lake were the face of a clock. Place Alden's big camp at twelve o'clock, with the boulder here at his feet at six o'clock.

The abandoned shack at the left hit roughly at ten minutes to the hour. The even more decrepit hovel at the right clove the dot at precisely ten minutes past. Ten minutes—to almost certain death! Leiter shivered, and lit a cigarette with fingers that shook slightly. Then he returned across the lake and ate a hearty supper, washing it down with a couple of hefty slugs of gin.

Six hundred thousand dollars *was* a lot of money. Enough to justify many things—even death by drowning, under ice which could tell no tales.

PAUL'S BIG HAM of a hand left the wheel and drooped loosely around his brother's shoulders in rough affection. "Leit, old timer," he said, "you're one of the finest—to walk down here in this weather. Lord, boy, it's good to see you."

Leiter laughed lightly. "Hey, lay off that," he said. "In a blizzard like this you'll end up in a snowbank if you take your eyes off the road for half a minute!"

Externally, the two brothers were cast from identical moulds. But to a shrewd observer, subtle differences would have been apparent. Leiter's speech, actions and reflexes were slow, and deliberate—Paul's quick and alert, with a sort of fitful intensity which was most marked when he was moved by strong emotion.

Once, as they swung off the main road, Paul attempted further conversation. "Leit, if Alden has dragged me out here to listen to some of his homemade puns I'll be heading back to the station tomorrow. He said it was of tremendous importance. Have you any idea what it's all about?"

Leiter shook his head. "No, he wouldn't tell me. But I have a feeling you won't be bothered with his jokes *this* trip." He motioned for his brother to swing off the state road and onto the dirt cut.

"Well, that's something to be grateful for, at least," exclaimed Paul.

Every muscle tensed, striving to keep his voice natural, Leiter continued to guide his brother as the latter swung the heavy car to the frozen surface of the lake edge, now buried under several inches of snow.

Here he suddenly asked him to stop the car. Through the swirling curtain of snow the light Leiter had left on the other side of the lake still blazed like a distant, star-bright beacon.

" 'Smatter, boy?" Paul shouted. "Don't tell me we're lost."

"No—only I'm afraid you'll

have to go in the rest of the way alone. I forgot that I promised Eph Parkins, down the road, to bring in his mail. I picked it up on my way down and it slipped my mind completely until just this moment." He pulled an envelope half out of his breast pocket to make the lie seem wholly convincing. "Look, Paul," he said pointing across the lake. "Head straight for that light. That's Alden's place. You can't miss it."

"Nonsense, kid," protested Paul, "we'll drive back and I'll wait for you. It's a rotten walk—"

"Oh, I can stand the exercise," Leiter said. "Besides, I owe Eph a visit. He'll drive me back to the camp. Just make yourself at home, and we'll have a bull session in half an hour."

He slapped his brother's knee in rough camaraderie, and slipped out of the car. Waving, he watched Paul's car accelerate slowly. As he watched, he experienced a sudden stab of something akin to remorse. For a brief instant he cursed the hell-begotten impulse which had led him to set the beacon—not in the living room of Alden's camp, but in the shack on the right, the one which had pointed to ten minutes past the hour! It shone steadily now, drawing the car to destruction.

Then a sort of eagerness took possession of his mind, completely blotting out the feeling of remorse and guilt which had swept over him for the barest instant. Greedily his eyes followed the course of the car as it ploughed with a fatal, dogged calmness towards the faint speck of light. Even as he watched, the shape of the vehicle dissolved into the distance until only a pale crescent of yellow, surmounted by the ruby dot of the tail light, betrayed its position.

After a moment the ruby dot mounted on the golden crescent blinked and vanished. Nothing remained but the darkness and the wind and the beacon which continued to slow steadily in the distance.

Leiter sagged with the physical let-down which followed the sudden release of nervous tension. His numbed fingers fumbled in the pocket of his heavy coat for the ignition key to his own car.

He stumbled blindly across the road, sought and found the jagged boulder from which he had fixed his compass points that afternoon. Behind the boulder was his car, cached by the side of the road, just as he had left it on his way down to the fatal tryst.

He had an absolute chart of the course—his watch. He drew it out, and bent over the luminous dial. The shack where the light burned lay at ten minutes past the hour. He started the car, and maneuvered it in front of the boulder, so that it pointed at twelve o'clock, the boulder at six o'clock, and the ten minute dot just bisected the

distant, steadily glowing light.

The car was now pointing directly towards Alden's place. He jumped out and made certain that the wheels were absolutely straight. They were, as far as he could ascertain, sufficiently close, at least, to provide an ample margin of safety, with a two-mile-wide stretch between the bad ice.

He had to be careful, he told himself—with his car pointing into blank nothingness. How could he be certain of steering a straight course, with nothing in front to guide him, and the light at his right? Simple. He merely made a rough adaptation of the device made famous by a British sportsman in capturing the world's speed record over the sands of Daytona beach.

The steering wheel of the car had no play. He took a thin strip of adhesive tape from his pocket, and affixed it vertically down the center of the windshield, sighting carefully along the wheel. He then drove an ordinary pin firmly into the top of the wooden wheel-grip. The two acted precisely as do the sights on a rifle. As long as the pin focused on the tape, the wheels of his car would remain straight. There would be a slight deviation, perhaps, but it would be negligible. And he had a two-mile margin for error.

The entire procedure took less than five minutes. He verified his direction once more by the watch, and bent above the wheel. The motor purred into life.

The car started smoothly, and the trip back for camp and the smoke was short. He desperately needed a cigarette and a slug of gin.

Leiter Bond's car sped smoothly over the ice. He remained vigilant, nerve-trigger alert, sighting carefully over the wheel, heading straight as an arrow for twelve o'clock—with the winking light that beckoned to death safely on his right.

There was a sudden splitting roar, and the front of the car lunged sickeningly downward. For one brief, terrible instant before the vehicle dived into the black water, Leiter Bond realized that he had crashed through rotten ice.

The thick night gave no further sign as the waters of the lake closed over the top of the car.

LAWYER ALDEN regarded Paul Bond with a look of relief in his genial blue eyes. They were standing in Alden's shack, at the window which looked out over the lake.

"I don't know whether to curse or bless this blizzard," he said. "I had an engagement in Portland, but I decided to pass it up right after I left here, and got a taste of this wretched weather. So I came back—and that was fortunate indeed. You see, I had told that exceedingly careless brother of yours

to leave a light on in this room.

"When I got back it was out. And not only that. Some damn tramp had left a light in that abandoned shack further down the lake. If I hadn't put it out, and lit this one—"

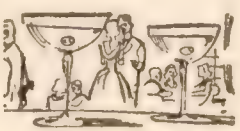
"Where do you suppose Leiter is?" Paul broke in, knowing that old Alden could ramble on for hours with his elaborate and meaningless explanations.

"He'll be along," Alden said.

They stood there in silence for a long moment. Paul was beginning to feel anxious about Leiter. "Maybe he stopped for some of Eph's famous cocktails," he said uncertainly. "Look at that snow. It was such a blur in my lights driving across the lake that I finally turned them out. It was easier without them. All I had to do was steer for your beacon."

"Let's go down to the shore," Alden suggested, a faint note of anxiety in his voice.

The two men put on their coats in silence. Between them there was now a sense of unspoken fear. They walked through the darkness down to the shore, and stood there peering into the blizzard. There was nothing to see but the night, nothing to hear but the howling wind.



THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET—in the next issue

STRING OF PEARLS

The Redhead Plays Shuttlecock with Death on Biscayne Bay

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Mr. Policeman

by JACK RITCHIE

IN THIS PART of the city we walk in pairs. If Chief Noonan could have his way, he'd put only negro cops here. He claims they understand the people better. They're more respected. That's what he says.

But there aren't enough to go around and so he does the next best thing, according to his book. He pairs them off with whites.

After roll call, Tommy Dade and I left the station and walked to the beginning of our beat at seventh.

It was a hot night with scarce breezes from the big lake. Tommy walked slow and easy and he smiled to himself. He was new on the force and young and he sniffed the air as though he enjoyed it.

I pointed to the dirty gutter with my nightstick. "That's what I smell, Tommy boy. Nothing else."

His smile was patient. "Don't let the bitterness get you, Frank. Take things as they come."

We were looking for Gillie Jones and so was every other cop in the city. But especially the ones in this ward. Gillie would stick out like a sore thumb if he went beyond Eighteenth street.

Two nights ago he'd been helping himself to a stack of used tires at a closed gasoline station when Blanchard and Kaminsky interfered.

Kaminsky was dead now. He left a wife and two kids and Kaminsky was a white cop.

The dark people sat on their porches and steps or walked without haste in the shadows of the

Anger and violence can make the pursuit of a killer hazardous . . . even in broad daylight. And the cops had more than night's sinister shadows to worry about.

night. They talked softly and laughed and then they were silent until we passed.

We turned down Chestnut where the sidewalks were lighted by the windows of the taverns, the hat-cleaning shops, and the fried chicken houses.

And here they leaned against the buildings and watched us, their faces expressionless. When they had to move aside, they did it slow.

The Ivory Coast Bar was thick with customers and the juke music played a bad second to the talk. We stood inside the doorway in the haze of smoke and the smell of spilled beer. The talk softened and they watched us, waiting to see what we wanted.

Behind the bar Big Mac licked his lips and began wiping the wetness off the hard wood.

I smiled slightly and went over to him. "Is there something you might want to tell me, Mac?"

His eyes flicked to the customers and then back to me. He shook his head. "I don't know a thing about Gillie. I ain't seen him for a week."

He grinned slyly at the brown people and spoke louder. "No, sir, Mr. Policeman. I just don't have no idea where that hero boy could be."

The bar was clean now and I leaned on it. "I'm always around, Mac. I'd hate to find out you're lying. That would kind of upset me."

When we were outside, Tommy Dade spoke as though he were trying to convince himself. "You can't blame them. They distrust policemen. Where most of them came from a policeman was somebody from another world and it wasn't their world."

We waited for the light on fourth and then stepped out into the street. My eyes went over the faces we passed. "Twenty years ago there were only a couple of hundred in the whole city. Today there are twenty-five thousand."

Tommy stepped up on the sidewalk. "They came up here because this was a better place to be."

We turned down the quiet side street that needed more lighting—one of the streets that sober whites avoided after dark.

In the middle of the second block we climbed up the crumbling cement steps of what had been the Graham mansion twenty years ago. A dozen men and women lounged on the big porch, some of them in creaking wicker chairs and others against the sagging railing.

I stopped next to the heavy woman at the big double doors. "Where's Ruby?"

She shrugged her big shoulders. "Maybe upstairs." Her teeth showed white in a grin. "You expect to find Gillie up there? He smarter than that."

"We're just checking again, Mrs. Neal," Tommy said.

She grinned wider and her body

shook with a chuckle. "You real polite for a policeman."

The wide marble staircase to the second floor was dirty and worn in the center of each step. The hall was musty with perfume and dust and the odors of cooking grease.

I stopped at the third door and put my hand on the knob.

Tommy touched my arm and shook his head. He smiled apologetically and then knocked.

Ruby Gannet took her time about coming to the door. She leaned against the doorway, one hand on her hips. She was tawny brown and sullenness glowed in her eyes.

"Gillie's not here," she said. "Did you expect him to be?"

I put my foot over the doorsill. "We don't expect anything. We just make sure."

She didn't budge. "I'd like to see a warrant. You got one of those, Mr. Policeman?"

I smiled and showed her my open hand. "Is that enough? Would you like to read it closer?"

Behind me Tommy coughed and his fingers found my elbow. I shrugged him off and kept looking at Ruby. She met my eyes defiantly for ten seconds, then shrugged and walked inside.

It was a large high-ceilinged room with a blocked-up fireplace at one end. When the Wilfred Grahams lived here, this had been their eldest son's room.

The ornate brass bedstead was still there, but scarred with knicks and scratches. A rusty gas plate stood on a shelf nailed to the dark oak paneling.

I flipped open the strap on my holster and moved to the closet. Standing to one side, I pulled open the door.

The long, deep room was filled with satiny dresses, mostly lavender, and the floor was a litter of shoes, boxes, stacks of confession magazines, and long dead bottles.

Ruby grinned when I came out. "Now try under the bed."

Tommy Dade was the nearest. Embarrassment showed on this face, but he stooped down and took a look.

Ruby laughed softly. "Don't let the dust scare you."

Tommy got to his feet looking sheepish and dusted his knees.

I ran my fingers over the fireplace mantle and regarded the dirt for a moment. "All right, Ruby. We get the general idea that Gillie's not here. But we also have the little bitty feeling that you just might know where he is."

Ruby found a pack of cigarettes and tapped one out. "Why the hell should I know where he is? I'm not his keeper."

I studied her. "Gillie killed a man. Anybody who helps him now answers for it. You never liked the county jail too much. Think of how ten years upstate would wear on you."

Her eyes became sulky. "You cops picked on Gillie all the time. He was never real bad. Just a few little things."

"Sure," I said. "And the little things became murder."

She watched me move around the room. The green marble clock was still there, but it wasn't running. The key was missing too.

Ruby ground her cigarette into the floor with her toe. "So another cop dies. Why should I cry about it?"

I turned and moved toward her but Tommy got in front of me. "Take it easy, Fred."

Ruby turned her back on us. "Put a uniform on a man and he thinks he's God."

There was a soft knock on the door. I slipped out my .38 and turned the knob.

The tall loose-jointed man stared at my uniform and then at the gun. He swallowed. "Guess I got the wrong place."

Ruby's voice came over my shoulder. "Come back in fifteen minutes, Hank."

He nodded and disappeared from the doorway.

I grinned at Ruby. "You didn't waste any time finding somebody else. Or was that just one of your customers?"

Her voice was bored. "Why don't you get the hell out of here?"

Downstairs I paused for a moment at the tall double doors to one side. "That used to be the music room, Tommy."

On the porch Mrs. Neal still rocked back and forth in her chair. She grinned. "You got hard luck, Mr. Policeman. You don't find no Gillie and we all feel real sorry for you."

When we stepped onto the sidewalk, I turned to look at the Graham place once more. It was a big tired house now and forty people lived in it. In the old days there had been only eight, and four of those were servants. And there had been a green lawn once too, but now there was only hard-packed earth.

"Tommy," I said. "I was born in that house. I lived there until I was twelve years old."

He stared at me uncertainly.

I grinned and started walking.

By midnight the side streets were almost deserted and we walked silently in their dimness.

Ahead of us I noticed two men under a lamp post. They were talking softly, but their conversation stopped as we approached.

I recognized Sam Barker, but the bull-shouldered man was new to me. I stopped in front of them. "You two got no homes to go to?" I asked.

The big man smiled faintly, but his eyes remained blank. "I'm free and over twenty-one. I like standing here. Is there some kind of curfew for people like me?"

I looked him over, but still couldn't place him. "Put your hands over your head," I snapped. "Both of you."

There was a clatter of metal in the gutter behind them. I turned on my flashlight and the beam picked out a pearl-handled switch knife.

I hefted it and snapped out the five-inch blade. "Which one of you belongs to this?"

I didn't get any answer.

I walked to the sewer grating fifteen feet away. The knife made a plopping noise as it dropped into the water.

There was a soft curse I could barely make out.

I came back and smiled. "Like I said. Put your hands over your head."

Sam put his hands up, but bull-neck didn't. His mouth moved and he was going to spit. I grabbed a fistful of his nylon shirt and pulled him close.

"Go ahead, big boy," I said. "But you'll never smile pearly white again."

He met my eyes and he wasn't afraid of the man in front of him. But the man was wearing a uniform and that made a difference. He could take you to a police station and turn you over to people who would knock you from one wall to the other. He knew that was true because of what everybody told him.

His hands went above his head, but he didn't hurry it.

His wallet told me that his name was Raff Hoggins. He carried a pocket knife, but the blade was less than three inches long and that made it legal to carry.

Sam wasn't carrying any at all and I grinned at him. "I guess you'll have a little trouble fishing yours out of the sewer. It looked so expensive too."

His lean dark face was patiently sad and he said nothing.

"Sam," I said softly. "You and Gillie once in a while walked through the same doorways. Maybe you could tell me where he is now?"

Sam Barker licked his lips. "No," he said, and then added, "Sir."

I looked at Tommy. "I guess we could arrange for Sam to talk in private. Let's call it resisting an officer. That ought to get him thirty days with the record he's got."

But Tommy didn't show a play-

along smile. He didn't like what I was saying. Even if I didn't mean it.

I turned back to Sam and Raff. "All right. Get the hell out of here."

They moved on and I started walking in the opposite direction.

Tommy caught up with me. "You can't blame them for feeling sore. Nobody likes to be stopped on the street and treated like he was a criminal."

I could hear the irritation in my voice. "People get searched by cops in the white neighborhoods too. Does that make you feel any better?"

At one o'clock we stopped at the call box to report in and then went on to Sukey's *All-Nite* for a cup of coffee.

We took two stools at the empty counter. Birdie Yates stayed at the cash register talking to a man in a yellow shirt.

Tommy Dade settled himself to wait. He studied the signs on the wall behind the counter.

I lit a cigarette, took a couple of puffs, and then swiveled the stool. "Get the lead out, Birdie, and draw two cups of coffee."

Her face slipped to sullenness, but she did as she was told.

I sipped the coffee. "I hear you go to law school nights, Tommy."

He smiled slightly. "There's nothing like ambition."

I grinned. "I'm loaded with it too. I'd like to be chief of police, but I don't think I'll make it."

Tommy caught Birdie's eye. "I'd like a piece of that lemon pie, Miss."

"The same for me," I said. "And don't die of ald age while you're getting it."

She brought over the two saucers and put them on the counter. Her hand went to her hip. "I ain't heard a thing about you big policemen getting poor little Gillie."

I glanced up. "Don't brood about it, Birdie."

She sniffed. "You won't get Gillie. He too smart."

"That's right," I said. "The brainy type that kills a man for twenty dollars worth of used tires." I picked up my fork and tried the pie. "Gillie can't leave this part of the city, this little town within a city. He can't take a bus, or a train, and there are eighty miles of white faces between him and the next place he can hide."

When we finished, I got up and headed for the door.

Tommy stayed at the counter. "You forgot to pay the lady."

I smiled faintly. "So I did." I found some change and tossed it on the counter.

Tommy followed me out and closed the door. "You take apples from the fruit stands too?"

"By the bagful," I said.

High in the sky heat lightning veined the darkness for a moment. We walked through the islands of light at the taverns and listened to

the sounds of the alcohol laughter.

At Third we turned into the rose aroma of the sweet bay trees next to what had been the Banning's coachhouse and later their garage.

As we started down the long slope, I touched Tommy's arm and stopped. He looked at me uncertainly as I pulled him into the shadows of a maple.

I pointed to the foot of the hill at the shadow that moved along the line of cars parked at the curb.

Tommy's eyes narrowed. "It looks like somebody trying to find a car with the ignition key in it."

We waited and watched the dark form glide silently from one car to another, pausing at each for a few seconds to peer inside.

When he came under the weak street lamp, I put my lips close to Tommy's ear. "That's our Gillie. The neighborhood hero is looking for transportation out of here."

I slipped the revolver out of my holster. "Let him get a little closer. And then don't worry about his civil rights. Try to think about what happened to Kaminsky."

We let Gillie get to within twenty feet of us before we stepped out of the shadows.

When Gillie heard us coming, it was too late. His eyes widened at the sight of our .38's and he froze.

His hands went up immediately, but I could read it in his moving eyes that he was going to make a break if he got half a chance.

And that chance came faster than he could have hoped for. Tires screached as a night joy rider swung his car around the corner. Headlights flashed into our eyes and that was all that Gillie needed.

He dived between two of the parked cars and headed fast for the alley.

Tommy's gun fired at the sky. "Stop!" he shouted.

And that's what we're supposed to do—according to the regulations. We're supposed to give warning and fire at the empty heavens three times before we got down to business.

But Gillie was four seconds away from escape into the darkness and I couldn't go according to the slow book. I leveled my gun quickly and fired.

Gillie went down like he'd been pushed and he hit the sidewalk hard.

Beside me, Tommy's voice was a whispered shock. "My, God! You killed him!"

I moved cautiously over to Gillie, bent over him, and pulled the automatic out of his back pocket.

Gillie was alive, but unconscious. My bullet had plowed a furrow along his skull, but as far as I could see it had done no more damage than to expose four inches of gray-white bone.

Lights began flashing on in the houses along the street and there was the sound of voices in the night.

Gillie moaned and in half a minute I had him sitting up. It looked to me like Gillie's fall had done more harm than my bullet. A couple of his front teeth were missing and a few more were loose. His face was raw and bloody from abrasions.

The dark people were leaving houses now, the men buttoning shirts, and a few women in dressing gowns straggled behind them.

I pulled Gillie to his feet and began putting the chain on his right wrist, but he screamed in pain. I threw the beam of my flashlight on his hand and saw that the wrist was broken.

The first of the people were here now. They stopped and watched and they were joined by others.

I linked the chain around Gillie's other wrist. "All right, Gillie. Start walking."

Beside me, Tommy uneasily eyed the silent faces surrounding us.

They moved before us, grudgingly, and then they followed—on the sidewalks, on the street, and on the dust where the grass should have been.

We began hearing the voices of hate. *The dirty fuzz beat up on Gillie. They nearly kill Gillie.*

Tommy Dade tried to act like a defense lawyer. "He fell. He fell. We didn't touch him."

"Shut up," I said. "No use talking."

They began to jostle us now and the curses grew louder and bolder. Gillie dragged his feet, a sly gleam in his eyes. He moaned and swayed.

The sea of dark faces loomed more solid between us and the call box. I used my shoulder, but got pushed back and almost went down.

The piercing voice of a woman cut through the low growls. "Kill the dirty fuzz!" she screamed.

She stood in the lighted doorway of what had been the Evans house, her body tall and gaunt. Her eyes rolled with hate and her big hands began the beat of a chant.

I shoved my club under my belt and pulled out the service revolver. The front of the crowd backed a little until it felt the pressure of the people behind.

"Take out your gun, Tommy," I ordered. "Two guns look bigger than one."

But Tommy didn't seem to hear me. His eyes were wide and his tongue flicked over dry lips.

I stared at him for a moment and then I fired my gun twice into the air. The crowd retreated a scant yard. I could see the glint of pocket knives and Gillie strained at my hand, shouting encouragement to the twisted faces.

The woman in the doorway shrilled again and there was an answering road from the mob.

I raised my gun quickly and fired. The bullet was a hornet past her ear and she screamed with fright as she leaped back out of sight.

My eyes went back to the dark faces and I was choosing my next target—the loudest one of them, the biggest, the one who would fall the hardest.

And then I finally heard it. The sound of the sirens. Somebody had called the station. Probably somebody with a job who didn't hate as much as the others.

And the mob heard the sirens too. Heads cocked slightly as it listened and blades were closed and slipped back into pockets.

In fifteen seconds the first squad car eased through the crowd, and then there was another, and still more.

The crowd cursed and spat, but things were different now. Nobody was going to rush us. Nobody was going to tear us apart.

We began to break up the mob and now Tommy Dade helped. He took out his gun and there was authority in his voice. He put his hand on chest and he shoved.

The patrol wagon came for Gillie and that helped. And we arrested some of the louder ones and that helped too. The crowd drifted away.

At two o'clock Tommy and I were alone again.

He stood looking down the deserted street, his eyes narrowed. There was the distant rumble of thunder, but I doubted if it would rain here in the city.

I tapped Tommy on the shoulder. "You can put your gun away now. There's nobody left."

At four in the morning we returned to the station to sign out. The streets had lost some of their darkness to the new dawn and the air was cooler. But I knew that was temporary. Later it would be hot and sticky and hard sleeping weather.

We walked to the bus stop and Tommy grinned. "You have this kind of excitement every night?" he asked.

"No," I said. "In the winter it's too cold. People stay inside."

I looked down Sixth street and I could see the dark corner towers of the Graham building. It was still impressive. If you didn't get too close.

It was the house I was born in. On the third floor, in the servants' quarters.

The bus came and Tommy got aboard. I watched it for a block. When it got to Eighteenth the neighborhood would start turning mostly white.

By Twenty-seventh it would be all white and Tommy Dade would be among people whose faces were the same color as his own.

I crossed the street and began walking toward the rooming house where I lived.

I would sleep among my own people too.

WAIT FOR TROUBLE

by NORMAN HUNT

He was the most dangerous kind of criminal . . . so the injured child's parents faced a choice.

IT WAS A two-story home with soft dark flowers growing around it. John Rome got out of the unmarked car and walked slowly up a crooked little cobble-stoned path, his face set in tight lines.

A girl's sobs were coming from an upstairs window. They stopped abruptly when Rome knocked on the heavy wooden door. There was a moment of silence and when the sobs picked up again they were higher in tone. Over the shrillness Rome could hear a man's light steps approaching the door till they were at least six feet away from the other side.

"Who's there?" a muffled voice demanded.

"It's Rome, Mr. Madden. Lieutenant John Rome."

The other man let out his breath in a rush, then came to the door and opened it. He was small and bald, with arms like pipestems. He was holding part of a wooden chair in one hand.

"Sorry about this," Madden said, dropping the chunk of wood into an opened closet on his right. "I carry it with me whenever I answer the door, these days."

"I hope it makes you feel better about answering doors, Mr. Madden."

"As a matter of fact, if nobody's home when I get in from work I look under all the beds and in all the closets. I don't think you can really blame me for being worried, Lieutenant Rome—after what's happened."

Rome didn't answer. The smell of cooked food seemed to dangle in the air, curl itself around the nostrils and then push its way inside and down the throat.

"Just a minute, please," Madden said, and walked over to the bottom step of a flight of wide white carpeted stairs. He made a bugle out of his hands and called:

"It's Lieutenant Rome, dear."

He turned away as a woman's deep voice responded briefly, and high-pitched sobbing started up again. Madden moved awkwardly and softly into a spotless living room and turned around with a hesitant smile.

"Can you drink when you're on duty, Lieutenant?"

"Wish I could." Rome settled himself in a soft chair. "I've got some news, Mr. Madden. I'm pretty sure we caught the man we've all been after."

"Oh? How can you be sure?"

"He was bragging about what he'd done," Rome said. "He got drunk and talked a blue streak. It was just about the sickest and vilest talk I've ever heard and that's saying a great deal. There were witnesses present, and I suppose they'll give corroborating evidence. That won't be nearly enough, of course, in view of the circumstances. But it's something."

"At least that's settled," Madden said, "and other kids will be safe from now on." He raised his head sharply at a fresh outburst of sobs upstairs. "I wonder where Gail gets the strength to keep on crying so much. My wife tells me

that she cries all day. She didn't cry much as a baby, and she's eight years old now. Eight, and some savage hits her like that."

Waiting for Madden to finish, Rome lit a cigarette and then snapped the match in two.

"He's a sick man," Rome said quietly, dropping both halves of the match into the gilt ashtray on the cocktail table. "The pervert, I mean. We hope to send him away for a long time, Mr. Madden, if we can get help."

"You should've killed him as soon as he was caught," Madden said vehemently. "You should have made sure he'd never be acquitted, that some smart lawyer won't be able to get him off."

"Policemen aren't vigilantes, Mr. Madden," Rome said, with more calmness than he was feeling at the moment. "The law says that a man as sick as he is has got to be sent away for treatment—if he's convicted. And unless I get some co-operation, Mr. Madden, that may be a pretty big 'if'."

Madden waited, his expression grim.

"A man who physically assaults one child might do it again to some other child unless he's put away first," Rome said, leaning forward slightly. "I think we can both agree about that much."

"Of course," Madden said, and nodded. "But what are you really trying to tell me, Lieutenant Rome?"

"Just this: in order to keep that pervert away from other small girls, he's got to be detained. I need help from your daughter to do it."

"From Gail?" Madden's lips had gone suddenly white. "She can't possibly help."

"Gail can identify the man in court."

"No. I won't have my child in a courtroom."

Rome sighed. "You've got a million and one good reasons for not exposing her to the man again, even in court. I've only got one reason why you should: if that pervert is set free, he might do it again to some other child. A man as sick as he is almost certainly can't help himself."

Madden walked up and down the room, his hands clasped tightly behind him. "Can't you get somebody else to do it?" he asked. "Another child?"

"We don't even know if there've been any more victims. And parents in such cases are usually too scared to come forward and make complaints. They fear retaliation. You haven't been afraid, Mr. Madden, and that's the right attitude."

"But you know what will happen if I let Gail testify!" Madden said. "That pervert will come out of prison or an asylum sometime! And how can I be sure he won't go after Gail again? How do I know he'll be satisfied with just using his fists on my child the next time?"

"Mr. Madden, I doubt very

much that you have anything to fear on that score," Rome said quickly. "Dont' you think he should be put away?"

"Not if it's going to hurt my Gail," Madden said firmly. "She's been through too much as it is. How can you ask me to expose her to such an ordeal?"

"If I don't ask, a dangerous pervert will go free."

"If this had happened to a grown woman, to my wife, say, I'd tell her that it's her duty to testify against him." Madden suddenly whirled around, snapping his fingers. "Here's an idea. Can't my wife go into court instead? She knows everything that Gail knows."

"She never saw the man."

"My wife could describe him, just as Gail did."

"That's not enough," Rome told him. "A judge wouldn't allow what your wife said as evidence. It would be hearsay, and not admissible in a court of law."

"All right, I suppose that's true. But I want to talk the whole thing over with—wait!" Madden suddenly ran out of the room.

After a pause, Rome heard him calling excitedly, "Andrea! Andy, come down here."

Flat-heeled shoes clattered down the stairs, but at a slower pace than Rome would have expected. He was even more surprised when she walked slowly and calmly into the living room.

Andrea Madden shook hands man-fashion. Her hand was dry and firm and bony, she was mannish in other ways as well. Her figure could have been a boy's. She didn't wear make-up, but was dressed in a shirt and slacks and flat-heeled shoes.

"I hate to leave Gail alone," she said, sitting down opposite Rome. "The child has never been as frightened as she is now. When she sees a strange man, she's likely to scream. She even cries when she sees a man's face on the television."

"That's rough, Mrs. Madden. I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"I'm sure you realize what a shock it would be to her if she had to testify against that pervert in court."

"Gail is young," Rome said quickly. "The shock would be momentary and should leave no lasting trauma. Some kids, of course, remember experiences like that for a long time. But whether that happens to Gail or not is up to her parents and absolutely no one else in the world."

"In a minute you'll be saying that it could have been worse," Mrs. Madden snapped, drywashing her hands. "Gail might have been molested! But knowing that it could have been worse, Lieutenant Rome, doesn't make either of us feel more secure in our minds."

"Then I assume you haven't changed your mind about taking Gail to court?" Rome asked.

Mrs. Madden didn't answer di-

rectly. "There's something else you might not know," she said. "Bob and I are going to take both of our daughters out of town as soon as possible and settle somewhere else."

"Both?"

"We have a younger child named Julie. She's six years old. We don't want anything to happen to her in this town—or anywhere else, for that matter."

"I didn't know there are two children," Rome said, folding his hands. "When do you plan to leave?"

"As soon as my husband disposes of his stationery store." Mrs. Madden said.

"In other words, you might not be here when he comes to trial?"

During the first seconds of final defeat, Rome looked at them pityingly. The Maddens didn't realize that they were putting themselves on a rack for the rest of their lives. They would be responsible for a known criminal walking the streets, and if he should commit an even worse crime they'd hardly be able to justify their own actions even to themselves.

"One more thing," Rome said carefully. "It probably won't mean much to you because you've already made up your minds about what you'll do. But somewhere in town tonight there's a young couple who are very proud of their little girl and want nothing but the best for her. In the very near future, those people are going to curse you with all their hearts, even if they don't know your names."

Mrs. Madden said abruptly, "Goodbye, Lieutenant."

Rome turned and strode toward the front door. Madden, walking fast to keep up with him, waited till they were out of his wife's earshot before he asked: "What are you going to do now, Lieutenant Rome?"

"I'll go back downtown and try to throw the fear of God into Hobart Cruze."

Madden was startled. "Cruze? Good God! I never thought—"

"I take it you know him, Mr. Madden."

"Why, I had to fire him a week ago," Madden said. "He was abusive, and he made scenes. Cruze must have done this to get revenge on me personally, Lieutenant. He isn't declaring war on other little girls in this town, I'm sure. You've taken a great load off my mind."

"Hobart Cruze's idea of revenge wouldn't occur to a normal man," Rome said bluntly. "Mr. Madden, you're letting an irrational and dangerous man go free."

"He isn't as dangerous as you claim."

"You and your family are going to escape from him, Mr. Madden. But somebody else's family isn't. You're making a stupid and selfish and arrogant decision." He went out, leaving Madden standing in the open doorway with a tormented look in his eyes.

JOHN ROME turned the last page of a report and then put it down on his desk. He hated paperwork, but there was no other way to check up on what his men had been doing in the field and he himself was responsible for a number of detectives under his command. His wife was constantly telling him that he worked too hard and ought to take life easier.

But on the other hand she was always buying things that they really couldn't afford. How he was supposed to goof off on the job and keep his wife in kitchen sets and expensive accessories was more than John Rome could figure out.

Three days had passed since Hobart Cruze had been let off with a severe warning. Cruze had been shifty-eyed and shaking, and had talked about being followed. He had threatened to sue the Maddens and his fellow prisoners, and had even claimed that one of the guards had manhandled him.

But nobody else had ever made a complaint about that particular guard, and Rome was more than ever convinced that the man belonged in a mental institution.

"Say, Lieutenant," a detective called out cheerfully, "you'll get blisters sitting there a whole day. Why don't you come on out and see some action.

"Anything new?"

The detective's face fell. "A street assault, Lieutenant. You'll have to handle it personally, I think, because they picked up the guy who did it and it's the same nut we had down here for a few days recently."

"You mean Hobart Cruze?" Rome made a fist and unmade it. "I'll go out and—take a look."

THE POLICE CAR Rome was using came to a stop next to another one that was almost surrounded by men and women who asked each other questions and could hardly bring themselves to walk away. The cops were becoming angry about it.

"Keep moving, please. Nothing to see. Keep moving, will you?"

Rome walked behind a detective who cleared space for him. The driver of the other police car sat rigidly at attention when he saw Rome.

"Picked him up with the victim, sir," the driver said, gesturing to the back seat where Hobart Cruze sat mouthing curses against a closed fist. One policeman sat solidly at his left and another at his

right. "It happened outside a supermarket and the victim had been reported missing not long before."

Rome asked suddenly, "What's that in his fist?"

The policeman at Cruze's right suddenly gripped the closed hand, forcing it open. Cruze yelled. A jagged-edged chunk of navy blue cloth with a drawing of Donald Duck on it dropped from Cruze's sweaty hand to the floor.

Rome looked at the dangerous and irrational man for a full minute; then turned around and walked toward the black-and-white ambulance parked at the corner. A policeman touched two fingers to his rumpled uniform and cleared space for Rome to climb inside. In the cramped space Rome saw a gray-eyed young intern sitting impassively on a hard chair.

"This case is pretty terrible," the doctor said promptly, and shivered as he glanced at the patient.

"I'm glad you explained that to me," Rome said mildly. The doctor was young—most of the men under Rome were young—and the victim, half-hidden by the bed, was obviously younger still. Sometimes he felt as if he was on the sidelines watching children live out their lives. "Any identification?"

The doctor eased a public school identification tag from the victim's neck. It was a rounded metallic slot the size of a half dollar, which had been held in place by pink-and-gold string.

Rome made out the name and address printed on the tag, and drew a deep breath. It was a little surprising that Hobart Cruze had been able to control his twisted desire for revenge as long as three days after having been released.

"Have the parents been told? No? I'll handle it."

Back in the squad car again he gave the address and sat tautly as he waited for the car to get to his destination.

It wasn't hard for him to imagine the parents' pinched faces and the continuing questions: *Why did it have to happen? Did that wretched pervert strike back at us because he knew we couldn't bring ourselves to take steps that would have kept him imprisoned for a long time? Did he feel sure he'd get away with it because nothing happened to him after he hurt Gail? Is that why he did it to our younger child, this time?*

Those were some of the questions he'd be hearing from Bob and Andrea Madden in a short while. But they'd know the real answers themselves even while they talked to him. By refusing a necessary though unpleasant task, they had built their own private hell in which to torture themselves and each other for as long as they lived.

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AN UNUSUALLY SUSPENSEFUL CRIME NOVELET

BY HIS HAND

Each of the chief murder suspects had behaved strangely toward the slain woman . . . bypassing all of the rules in love's game. And that posed a problem for Crocker.

by MAX VAN DERVEER

MURDER IS NOT complicated. Not if you are a cop. Murder only becomes complicated in the mind of the hack. That's where all of the byroads, crossroads, inroads, and outroads—with one, naturally, leading to the killer—are spawned. Murder, for a cop, means someone is dead and someone has killed. All a cop has to do is find out who is dead, how he or she died, and who has killed—temporarily insane, totally insane or with dispassion. Murder, for a cop, is routine. Part of a job.

Sergeant Gilbert Crocker, a twenty year veteran of the Detective Division at Central Police headquarters, still did not like this part of that job.

On Monday, the young woman who now lay on her back on the carpeting of the expensively-furnished living room had been alive and beautiful. But today was Wednesday and the young woman had been dead, the medical examiner had estimated, at least forty-eight hours. In death she was no longer beautiful.

"I wonder what she was like," Hugh Pierce mused.

Crocker grunted. "You would."

He saw Pierce wince and he knew the young detective was struggling hard to temper a quick swell of anger. "You know what I mean," Pierce said sullenly.

"Wealthy, intelligent, estranged." Crocker squatted beside the rigidly distorted body, hating the change which death had wrought. He could not seem to tear his eyes from the dead woman's hideously discolored throat. "And strangled."

"The super was a barrel of information, huh?"

"Before he got sick."

Pierce went to a shiny window and looked out on the gray, soggy March afternoon. It had started to snow again. At twenty-six, powerfully constructed and a coffee fiend, he was the newest man in the division. Someday he would be a good detective. But right now there was still a wide streak of adolescence in him that became flagrantly evident in the presence of women—any woman. Even a dead woman. And because of this streak Crocker did not particularly care for him.

Crocker said, "You won't find a killer standing there, Sergeant."

"He has to be out there somewhere," Pierce said, continuing to look on the city.

"He?"

Crocker — forty-seven, blunt, bulky, homespun and habitually ill-dressed—remained in a squatting position beside the body until Pierce turned from the window.

"It takes strength to strangle," Pierce said.

Crocker rose laboriously and a morgue attendant pushed away from the wall. "Sergeant, can't we have her?" he said. "It's gettin' near quittin' time."

"Yours," Crocker grumbled.

The morgue attendants loaded the woman unceremoniously and removed her from the apartment as if she might be a bundle of still-soiled, wet wash.

Crocker drew a deep breath. The routine, preliminary probing was finished. Now it was time to go to work.

He went to the front door and bleakly studied a bronzed lock chain that dangled from the jamb. Two screws in the lock's hasp had been ripped from the door wood and the hasp also dangled. But that had been their work. They had been forced to break into the apartment after the building superintendent had opened the conventional knob lock with a master key.

"How does anyone strangle a woman and then walk out of here locking everything behind him including putting a chain lock in place?" Pierce asked.

"I don't know," Crocker said truthfully.

"We have the same kind of locks on the door of our apartment, but we seldom use the chain. My wife will when I'm gone at night. But

the point is, how could anyone fit the damn thing from outside the door?"

"I'll bet we'll find out soon enough, Sergeant," Crocker said with a determined scowl.

They went over the apartment again. There was no rear door. They inventoried the bedroom, looking somberly on the turned-down bed. The closet and bureaus revealed a rich taste in clothing. Then they turned to the windows. They examined each window minutely, paying particular attention to the locks. Each lock appeared to be a new one and each was securely fastened.

"I think we can take a couple of things for granted," Pierce finally said. "Penelope Hern opened the front door to her killer and the guy is a damned magician."

"Not a magician," Crocker said grimly. "Smart. That's all. Let's find Anderson and the super."

They found Sergeant Anderson on the seventh floor chain-smoking through the tedious task of pounding on doors. He turned at their approach, snapping shut the notebook he'd been consulting.

"So far there are five tenants—all on the fourth floor—who admit they knew or would recognize Penelope Hern," Anderson said. "The last time they saw her was on Monday. Three of them saw her in the morning. The other two on Monday afternoon at about five o'clock."

"Is that all?" Crocker asked, scowling.

Anderson's grin was crooked. "Except for a redhead on the third deck who 'simply loves policemen'."

"Maybe the wrong guy is poundin' doors, huh, Andy?" Crocker grunted, shooting a significant look at Pierce. "Okay, keep knocking. We'll be with the super."

THEY FOUND Herbert Fillmore, tiny and effeminate, in his ground floor office-apartment. He was finished being ill. His color remained ashen, his eyes were bright little hollows above protruding cheekbones and he nervously kept passing a delicate, long-fingered hand over a thin-haired pate. But he seemed capable of intelligent conversation.

"I'm sorry, Sergeant," he said in a weak voice. "I didn't want to become ill. But Mrs. Hern was—well, I guess I'm not a physically or emotionally strong man."

"Yeah," Crocker agreed bluntly. And then he got down to business. "We want to go over some things again. Some of what you told us be-

fore you became sick. It appears Monday was the last day Penelope Hern lived."

Fillmore nodded. "Monday was the last time I saw her. That was at approximately five o'clock in the afternoon. I'd been to the market on Phillips. That's the next street over. I am a bachelor, you see. Anyway, I had been to the market and I left there at ten minutes before five o'clock. I remember the exact time, because I looked at the market clock as I was leaving. The market is a ten minute walk from here."

"Then you saw her after you returned here?"

"She was leaving a cab out front as I came along the sidewalk," Fillmore said. "We entered the building together."

"Did you normally see her every day?"

"Yes, I think you could say that."

"But you didn't see her Tuesday?" Crocker asked.

"No."

"Or today?"

"Not until I found her this afternoon and telephoned you gentlemen."

"And just how did you happen to find her, Mr. Fillmore?"

"Her mail was accumulating," Fillmore said. "I thought it was odd. I knew she was not away on a trip."

"So you took the mail up to the apartment."

"Yes," Fillmore said.

"And knocked."

"Yes."

"And didn't get an answer."

Fillmore nodded. "That's when I became worried. I returned here and telephoned upstairs. Again there was no answer. I decided to investigate."

"Do you have this much concern for all of your renters, Mr. Fillmore?"

"I purposely make it my business, Sergeant, to know my people and their habits. It's—merely good business."

"You mean you discriminate in renting."

"This is my building, Sergeant. Fillmore Arms."

"All right. About this mail. Do you have it?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to look it over."

"It's charge account bills," Fillmore explained. "The normal end of the month accumulation. Nothing more."

"I'd still like to have a look at it," Crocker said.

The mail appeared to be exactly what Fillmore had said it was. An accumulation of monthly statements. The accumulation figured. Lord, didn't he know? February had just run its course, giving way to dismal March. His mail box was stuffed daily with similar demands.

Crocker pocketed the envelopes. "Let's get back to after you telephoned the Hern woman's apart-

ment and didn't get an answer. What did you do then?"

"I took the master key and went upstairs, knocked several times and finally attempted to open her door. However, the chain lock was on. I wasn't sure what to do then. But I felt sure Mrs. Hern was inside. I mean, there's no way anyone can leave an apartment and fasten the chain lock from outside."

"That thought has entered our minds, too," Crocker nodded.

"Yes—well, when I found the chain lock in place I called out and then when I didn't get an answer I attempted to peek through the door crack. I saw her on the carpeting."

"And came down here and called us."

"Yes."

"How did you know that she was dead, and not merely ill?"

"I could see enough of her, Sergeant, to know that she was beyond illness."

"I see." Crocker paused. Then: "About these locks. I have the impression Mrs. Hern was particular about locks."

"She was," Fillmore agreed readily. "Very particular."

"There were two on the only door in the apartment and all of the window locks looked new."

"Each apartment door has a knob and chain lock, Sergeant. They are standard in many apartment houses, motels and hotels. However, in Mrs. Hern's case the window locks *are* new."

"Why?" Sergeant Crocker asked.

"I had them put on at her request."

"Why?"

"Penelope—Mrs. Hern was quite sensitive about being alone."

"You mean she was afraid of housebreakers?"

Fillmore shook his head. "I mean exactly what I said. She was sensitive about being alone. She did not like to be alone. And when she was in her apartment she always was locked in. It was a quirk of personality with her. I think psychologists would say she suffered from autophobia."

"Uh-huh," Crocker grunted as if he understood.

Sergeant Anderson entered the apartment through a cloud of cigarette smoke. "Nothing new, Gil. You've got it. The five on the fourth deck, but there were some doors where I didn't get an answer. I'll have to check them out later."

Fillmore looked at Anderson disdainfully. "I assume from your words, sir, you have been interrogating my tenants."

"All we are attempting to do is determine when Mrs. Hern died," Anderson said. "The day, the hour. *Exactly* when."

Crocker waved Anderson off Fillmore. "Did anyone hear anything?" he asked.

"They say not."

Crocker was not surprised. No noise, no screams. In a sense, it fitted the pattern. Penelope Hern

had known her killer, perhaps intimately.

Crocker fixed Fillmore with a steady stare. "You told us earlier the Hern woman was independently wealthy, right?"

"Not necessarily independently wealthy, Sergeant, but she had means. Her husband provided for her quite adequately."

"By court order?"

Fillmore shook his head. "I do not think by court order, although I can not be certain, of course. Mr. and Mrs. Hern were estranged. Not divorced."

"They didn't live together, but he continued to provide for her financially. Is that it?"

"It was the usual separation arrangement, yes."

"How many men do you know who provide money for a wife voluntarily, if they are no longer living together."

"Actually, I didn't expect it of Harry Hern," Fillmore said.

"You don't like him?"

"Did I say that?"

"You act as if you didn't."

Fillmore rubbed his head.

"Why don't you like him?" Crocker pressed.

"He is an obnoxiously egotistical man."

"Capable of killing his wife?"

"Mentally capable."

"Not physically?"

"I believe you said Mrs. Hern was strangled?"

"For the moment, we're working on that theory."

"Harry Hern only has one hand. His right hand. He lost his left hand and forearm in the Korean War. He has a mechanical device for a left hand, of course, and he is quite dexterous with it, but I do not think it would be much use in strangling another person."

"I see," Crocker said, not really sure what he saw. He picked at his nose. Then: "You also said this Hern is a writer?"

"Yes."

"Any other employment?"

"No. He is a succesful writer."

"Measured financially," Crocker asked.

"Is there another way these days?"

Crocker skipped that. "Where does he live?"

"Somewhere in the city. I can not give you an address."

"But you're sure he's in town?"

"He vsited Mrs. Hern Sunday afternoon," Fillmore said.

"And remained Sunday night?"

"No."

"Perhaps he was in the apartment over night and all day Monday—without your knowledge."

"Definitely not," Fillmore assured him.

"You'd know, huh?"

"I would, Sergeant."

"Eagle eye again?"

Fillmore became flustered. "I'm not sure I understand what you mean."

"The hell you don't. Who else visited the Hern woman?"

"Sergeant, really—"

"This is no time to clam, Fillmore."

"Well, she did occasionally have—another male visitor."

"Sunday?"

"No. I haven't seen Mr. Cronin since—let's see, I believe it was Thursday evening. Yes, I'm sure that is correct. Mr. Vincent Cronin visited Mrs. Hern last Thursday evening."

"Who's he?"

"Merely an acquaintance."

"Some acquaintances get damn close, Fillmore. Just how occasional were these visits?"

"Well, of course I wouldn't know every time Mr. Cronin—"

"How often did you visit her, chum?"

"What!"

"You're a bachelor. You have keys. She was an attractive woman and—as you said—estranged."

"Sergeant, I resent the inference!"

"So maybe we should talk about this Cronin? You said he visited Mrs. Hern what—three, four nights a week?"

"Until Friday, every night."

"You sound like a jealous man. Was Vincent Cronin sleeping with Mrs. Hern?"

"I wouldn't know!"

"You must've seen him leave the building occasionally."

"Yes. . . . All right, there was a morning or two."

"More like several mornings, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Did Mr. Hern ever show up any of these nights?"

"No. He restricted his visits to Sunday afternoons once or twice a month."

"How long have he and his wife been separated?" Crocker asked.

"Perhaps seven months."

"And how long has Cronin been coming around?"

"Perhaps a year."

"Then he was a factor in the Hern's split?" Crocker asked.

"I wouldn't know."

"But he and Hern know each other."

Fillmore nodded "They do."

"Were they friendly?"

"They are."

"Are?"

"Mr. Cronin always chats a bit when I happen to meet him coming into the building. And almost invariably he mentions lunching with Mr. Hern."

"What does Cronin do? I don't think you said."

"He is a floor manager at a club called The Feather."

"A what?"

Fillmore frowned. "A floor manager. Frankly, I can't vouch for that since I do not frequent nightclubs, but Mr. Cronin did say that he is a—"

"In our parlance, Fillmore, the term is bouncer. Sometimes heavy."

"I wouldn't know," Fillmore said.

"Does Cronin carry a gun?"

"What? Well, most certainly not! I do not permit firearms in the building!"

"And nothing goes on in the building you don't know about, huh? How come you haven't seen Cronin since last Thursday night? Haven't you been watching for him —or did you give up with Mrs. Hern?"

Fillmore looked properly agitated. "I believe Mr. Cronin and Mrs. Hern had an argument that night."

"You overheard the argument?"

"I did not. Mrs Hern mentioned it to me."

"What were they quarreling about?"

"She didn't go into details, Sergeant—and I didn't ask."

"But it was serious?"

"Apparently," Fillmore said.

"Has Mrs. Hern had any other male friends visit her—since or before Thursday night?"

Fillmore sat stiffly erect and stone-faced. There was considerable color in his cheeks now. "Sergeant, I do not know what kind of a woman you think Mrs. Hern was, but I certainly can vouch for her morals. They were impeccable. In the first place—"

"Yeah, I know," Crocker interrupted tersely. "You are not operating a den of iniquity. But has Mrs. Hern had other male guests?"

"Mr. Hern on Sunday afternoon, as I told you—and her brother, naturally."

Crocker raised his eyebrows. "Brother?"

"Alvin Dalton. He looks older, but he is two years younger than Pen—Mrs. Hern."

"When did he show?" Crocker demanded.

"Saturday morning."

"Why?"

"He conversed with Mrs. Hern every Saturday morning. He has for as long as the Herns have lived here. I believe there was some kind of financial arrangement between them."

"The Herns and Daltons or the brother and sister?" Crocker asked.

"Between Mrs. Hern and Mr. Dalton."

"What kind of an arrangement?"

"I believe she has been supporting him."

"Isn't he employed?"

"I sincerely doubt if the man has worked a day in his life."

"You don't like him either, do you?"

Fillmore shook his head "I do not."

"Why?" Crocker asked.

"He is a—I believe the term is *lush.*"

"He drinks."

"He appears to be continually on the verge of intoxication."

"Then Mrs. Hern considered him a burden."

"She did not. After all—the man is—was her brother."

"Blood is thick, you mean?"

"In the case of the Daltons, yes."

Silence suddenly was heavy in the apartment as Crocker paused. He rubbed the end of his nose, digesting what he had. There were several loose ends, plenty to check out. What the hell, few more dangling ends at this stage wouldn't hurt.

Sergeants Pierce and Anderson and Mr. Fillmore sat waiting expectantly. He couldn't disappoint them. "Okay, Fillmore," He said, "how many other men were there in the life of this woman?"

"I am not acquainted with any, sir."

"Women?"

"Mrs. Hern did not like women."

"So her little world revolved around a husband, boyfriend and brother, huh?"

"Basically," Fillmore said.

"Aren't you forgetting someone? Yourself, for instance."

Fillmore frowned heavily. "Sergeant, I wish you would not insist upon conjuring a relationship between—"

"Love isn't always a bed of roses, is it, chum?" Crocker left his chair suddenly to loom over Fillmore.

"I wouldn't know," the little man said frostily.

Crocker grunted. "We're sealing the apartment for a couple of days. We don't want anyone entering it under any circumstances. Anyone. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"So far you've been a good citizen. Cooperative. I'd like to think we can keep counting on you."

"You can," Fillmore assured him.

Pierce and Anderson were moving toward the door. Crocker lumbered after them. Suddenly he whirled. "Which one are you picking as her killer, Fillmore?"

"Her husband," he said positively, "if he was physically capable. But under the circumstances, I'd say Vincent Cronin."

Outside, Anderson lit a fresh cigarette as they piled into the unmarked police sedan. "What ever

happened to the good old fashioned love triangle, Sergeant?"

"Haven't you heard, Andy?" Crocker said with mocked surprise. "It's as antiquated as divorce laws."

IT WAS FIVE minutes before six o'clock when they arrived back at the police building and it was snowing large, wet flakes. Pierce started to turn the sedan into the entrance of the basement garage. Crocker told him to park at the curbing.

"The Lieutenant will be waiting," he said wearily. "And I've got a hunch he isn't going to let this one warm overnight."

They vacated the sedan. Anderson dumped the collection of cigarette butts from his coat pocket, lit a fresh cigarette and they tromped through the accumulation of slush on the sidewalk and up the steps of the police building side by side and silent.

The evening was raw and blustery. Crocker hunched into himself. Cold was his misery and he accepted the mass of warmth inside the building with the gratitude of a novice hunter coming in out of woods to a crackling fireplace.

Pierce stopped at the coffee vending machine. Crocker and Anderson turned into the shopworn squad room. The night trick of detectives was coming on, cluttering the room. Crocker didn't speak to anyone. He went into Lieutenant Gifford's office. The blintz addict, long and lean in shirt sleeves, was hunched over his desk, using a pencil as a guide as he read the top sheet of a sheaf of papers.

Gifford immediately dropped the pencil upon the entrance of the two detectives and looked expectant. Pierce came into the office with a paper cup of steaming black coffee as Crocker laboriously began to recount the death and background of Penelope Hern (nee Penelope Dalton) . . . Caucasian . . . age, 34 . . . Apartment 41-B, Fillmore Arms, 2323 Harrison Avenue.

Gifford listened stoically. When he finished his report, Crocker put the collection of Penelope Hern's mail on the desk. Gifford opened the envelopes with Crocker looking on curiously. Penelope Hern had had large charge accounts in many of the city's best stores. Gifford stacked the opened envelopes neatly before him and picked up the phone.

Yes, a Vincent Cronin had been issued a gun permit. Vincent Cronin also was clean. No record. Not even a hint.

Gifford made a second call and held the receiver away from his ear. Crocker could hear the loud voice coming through it. "Strangled, Giff," the medical examiner said. "No doubt about it. Time of death sometime Monday night. Say ten or eleven o'clock. Also no doubt."

Crocker asked for the receiver. "Doc, what the hell is autophobia?"

"It is not in the psychiatric handbooks. Probaby someone is pulling your leg. I suppose you could define it as self-fear."

Crocker put the phone together. Gifford said tersely, "Bring them in. Hern, Cronin, Dalton."

The phone directory revealed addresses. Crocker found Harry Hern in a vast apartment on the Eastside. He was a totally unkempt man of probably forty-five years with an aura of self-love and perfectly capable of complicating murder—at least, on paper. But he was cooperative.

Pierce accompanied a faintly smiling Vincent Cronin, young, hard-muscled, exuding an air of sublime respectability, from a nightclub. Cronin also was cooperative.

Anderson had to dig. He finally turned up a rum-soaked Alvin Dalton in a gin mill on the river front. Dalton needed a bath and a shave and was pleasantly swacked.

Each had heard about Penelope Hern's untimely demise on that alluring, pompous, skim-the-cream purveyor of public information: television. And each justly claimed to have been left infuriatingly uninformed by the purveyor.

"Permitted or not," Harry Hern stated benignly, running a finger down the bridge of a hook nose, "I draw an unlikely parallel. Dear

Penelope, in departure, has, in my mind, equaled the Iliad of foreign aid: I know goddam little about either, but I am currently blessed with the rather illuminative suspicion that we three have suddenly acquired ignominious salience. To wit—"

"Knock it," Lieutenant Gifford said tautly.

"To wit, dear plain-clothed minions of the law," Hern continued fluently, "we are suspects. Correct?"

"Suppose you tell us about the minion," Gifford shot back angrily.

"Lieutenant, you are being derogatory. I must have a moment. I reflect."

Hern held up a large right hand and Sergeant Crocker boiled. He understood perfectly Fillmore's dislike for this man. Hern grated. And the irritation deepened as Hern continued to sit with his hand aloft in a halting position, like an intersection traffic cop. He was poised and arrogant in an unpressed tweed suit with leather patches on the elbows of the coat, coolly enjoying his role on stage. The steel and leather mechanical device that had been fashioned into

a special left appendage glinted in the room light.

Suddenly Hern lowered the hand. "Perhaps you are not being derogatory, after all, Lieutenant. But you are addressing the wrong man. Penelope was Vinnie's minion, but she was my wife."

Crocker hunched forward out of his chair. "There are certain questions I have to ask. It would be to your advantage to answer them in a straightforward way."

The interruption surprised Hern. His dark eyes darted from Crocker to Gifford. The Lieutenant said, "Sergeant Crocker is heading this investigation."

"Why?" Hern asked bluntly.

Gifford ignored the question and Crocker growled, "Where did you get the meat hook?"

He had hoped complete and outrageously callous disdain for this man's physical disability would rattle him and for just an instant he was positive Hern teetered on the brink of tumbling from his pedestal of verbiage. But Hern recovered as all resourceful warriors do. He lifted his left arm, slid up the sleeve of his coat and smiled on the long, slender device.

"Do you recall Adolph's master race, Sergeant?"

The question was an answer.

Crocker grunted.

Hern worked the device. Two small, flat, spring-operated plates at its end opened and closed several times. His smile took on smugness. "As you can see, I am quite capable of picking up and holding small objects such as pencils and paper. I am capable of typing. Actually, I am an accomplished hunt and peck typist. I have to be in my profession. What else, Sergeant?"

"It's different," Crocker admitted sourly.

"Certainly, it is different. I designed it."

"You're a writer, huh?"

"A serious literary craftsman, Sergeant. There's a distinct difference between a writer and an author. I am an author. I am not a hack."

"That means you are good?"

"Very good indeed—if my unbiased opinion is of interest to you."

"Did your wife think so?"

"No—but then she was capable of little thought."

"Are you sorry about her?"

"If you mean, am I grieving over her loss, I'm not. None of us are."

"None?" Crocker said sharply.

"We three." Hern encompassed the silent Vincent Cronin and Alvin Dalton with a wave of his good hand. Then he looked at his companions. "Are you overwhelmed with grief because Penelope is gone, Vinnie?"

Vincent Cronin shrugged.

"Al?"

"Not at all," Dalton said with a wide, drunken grin.

Crocker was angry. "Where were you Monday night, Hern?"

"With Vinnie and Al," the man said easily.

"Where with Vinnie and Al?"

"We became quite intoxicated. We made a deliberate effort to become intoxicated and, as usual, we succeeded. It's a ritual with us, Sergeant. We become intoxicated every Monday night. We like each other." He paused. "And after we became intoxicated, we retired to my abode and slept it off. This, too, is a ritual."

"Let me get this straight," Crocker growled. "The three of you went out together Monday night, got drunk, then went back to your apartment to sleep it off. Is that what you want us to believe, Hern?"

"You do believe in the truth, I trust, Sergeant?"

"Which one of you killed her?"

"None." Hern hesitated again and Crocker visualized the wheels turning in this man's mind. He saw the crafty light creep into Hern's eyes, the smile become set on his face.

"Or—" Hern said. He looked at his companions. "—perhaps one of us faked out the night. Perhaps one of us was not intoxicated, and merely pretended to slide into that capricious condition. Perhaps one of us awaited sleep to creep over the other two, then went out and slew dear Penelope, returned and slept peacefully, content in the knowledge that a she-devil had been obliterated. Vinnie, was it you?"

Vinnie Cronin, neat in a dark suit and necktie, smiled as if he harbored a secret. "I suppose it could have been."

"He's not telling the truth," Alvin Dalton put in slurringly. He almost spilled out of the chair. "It was me, Harry. That's just what I did. I sneaked out of your place and—"

"Please, Al," Hern said, shaking his head. "I do abhor disagreement, but I must confess. It was I."

"Goddamnit" Crocker roared. "What are you trying to pull, Hern?"

Harry Hern laughed softly. "Your leg," Sergeant—and I think it has been yanked."

Crocker shot a dark look at Lieutenant Gifford, and Gifford, flushed, tense, snapped, "Pierce, Anderson, get those two out of here." He arched a thumb at Vincent Cronin and Alvin Dalton. "And sober the drunk."

SERGEANT CROCKER had managed to regain some control of his anger by the time the room was cleared. But he felt a fresh flare as he started on Hern. The man made him seethe.

"From now on, I want straight answers, Harry," he said heatedly.

"Certainly, Sergeant," Hern said, looking down on his scuffed shoes. He made no pretense to hide his grin. "It does seem you are con-

fronted with a major problem," he added. "Which one of us killed Penelope? Of course, if we individually continue to maintain that it was—"

"Straight answers," Crocker broke in. "No more garbage."

Hern suddenly looked at him headon and Crocker felt better. He had finally gotten inside this man. Hern's eyes were anger-dilated now, his jaw set.

"I want to know where you were Monday night," Crocker persisted. "Details."

"The Ambassador," Hern said crisply.

"It's a joint where?"

"It is not a joint. It is a lounge and supper club at twenty-nine Arlington Drive."

"You were there alone, weren't you, Harry? We can check."

"I'm sure you will, and you will find that I was accompanied by Vincent Cronin and Alvin Dalton. You will find, Sergeant, that we arrived at the club a few minutes after the opening hour – four o'clock in the afternoon. We occupied the cocktail lounge until six o'clock when we retired to the dining room. We returned to the cocktail lounge at approximately seven-thirty and that we departed from The Ambassador a few minutes before ten o'clock—intoxicated."

"You quit boozing kind of early, didn't you?"

"We started early."

"So you drove to your place, huh?"

"We used a cab. You can check that, too."

"You can be sure we will, Harry. What happened after you arrived at your apartment?"

"Al went to bed. Vinnie and I

had another drink and then we, too, turned in for the night."

"Why didn't Al and Vinnie go home?"

"They seldom do on Monday nights. They usually remain with me."

"Why?"

"We normally drink most of the night."

"But not last Monday night, huh?"

"No. We were fatigued."

"All of you?"

"All of us."

"I think you're putting on the garbage again, Harry."

Hern ran his good hand over a mop of unruly bronze-colored hair and shrugged. "Your option, of course."

"Tell me about your wife."

"What about her?"

"Well, for one thing, did she normally sleep in the nude?"

"For as long as I've known her."

"And just how long has that been?"

"Seventeen years."

"Were you married all that time?"

"We were married fourteen years."

"I understand you two split six, seven months ago."

"The fourteen includes the past year."

"What caused the split?"

"I was out of love with Penelope. Falling out of love, Sergeant, is as real as falling in love. This possibly shatters a dearly hugged illusion of the marriage counsellors—and cops—but illusions be damned. It can and does happen in all corners of our unintelligent, intolerant society. All most persons fail to do is accept the happening."

"Fit Cronin in that pattern for me."

"Where?"

"With your wife."

"Oh. Vinnie has his tastes. I have mine."

"That's not a run-of-the-mill attitude, Harry."

"I am not a run-of-the-mill man, Sergeant."

"Did you push him on her?"

"It wasn't necessary."

"They hit it off from the start, huh?"

"They found, and had, a mutual ground. Need I blue print it for you?"

"Doesn't that bother you?"

"If it had, or did, Vinnie Cronin would not exist in my life."

"You mean you would have ended his life?"

"Please, Sergeant."

"How long have you known him?"

"Approximately two years."

"I'm trying to get the connection, Harry. I can't quite see you, your wife and Vinnie. Vinnie is a heavy, a bouncer. You're not in his league."

"There was a day, Sergeant, Penelope and I steadily frequented The Feather. We became acquainted

with, and liked, Vinnie Cronin. I still feel the same way about him."

"That simple, huh?"

"If you choose to complicate it, that, too, is your option."

"I'd rather you told me the truth. That your wife took up with Cronin, that—"

"Sorry, it wasn't that way. I merely used their mutual interest as a stepping stone. When I saw the interest developing it seemed an appropriate hour to depart. I would have departed eventually without the presence of Vinnie or any other man."

"Then it was you who walked out."

"Departed, Sergeant. I merely took the initiative."

"Your wife felt as you did? She was out of love, too?"

"Yes."

"Of course, she's not around to refute that now."

Harry Hern rubbed his nose and shrugged.

"You visited her occasionally."

"My departure did not totally eliminate all of our problems."

"Such as—"

"Tax problems. We both had them."

"How come you made these occasional pilgrimages to your wife only on Sunday afternoons?"

"Vinnie was seldom there on Sunday afternoons."

"You didn't like to interrupt, huh?"

"I made sure I did not interrupt."

"And you're sure it was only your problems that drew you back? It wasn't because you continued to support your wife—even after you two parted?"

"Sergeant, there was never a day I supported Penelope. She was a Dalton. Dalton shoes. Her father, upon his passing, willed her three and one-half million dollars. That was five years ago."

"We were told you were supporting her, Harry."

"Fillmore is a gullible fool."

"Why do you bring him into this?"

"You have not conversed alone with Vinnie or Al. That leaves Fillmore. Fillmore is the only man left in the world who might know anything at all about the Hern's financial status. Among other things, my wife had an unfortunate habit of talking too much – especially to fools."

"So why would Fillmore tell us—"

"I judge he is justifying my occasional visits, Sergeant. The poor fool was in love with Penelope, you know. But it can be hell when you are sitting on the sideline."

"Did you kill her, Harry?"

"Did I?" he questioned in answer with a wide, easy grin. "Sergeant, the three of us killed her. Vinnie, Al and—"

"Pierce," Crocker bawled, half-rising.

The exchange was swift. Harry Hern, grinning egotistically, was

ushered from Gifford's office and Vincent Cronin, who looked as if he could be anyone's brother, was brought inside. Crocker used the exchange to look at Gifford. The lieutenant lifted his shoulders in the silence that ensued.

Cronin sat in the chair vacated by Hern. He crossed his knees and lit a cigarette. He was athletic and immaculate in body and dress, perhaps thirty. The fingernails of his strong, muscular hands had been expertly manicured. He seemed completely at ease. He didn't appear to be irritated about being pulled in by the cops and yet there was an air about him that said the police rated, at best, a tolerant kind of condescension.

Crocker pounced on him fast. "You heavy tonight, Vinnie?"

"I seldom am, Sergeant," he said in a soft voice and with an affable smile.

"But you do have a ticket."

"And a gun."

"How come?"

"When I became employed by Mr. Rommer, he requested—"

"Sol Rommer?"

"The Feather is one of his business enterprises."

"Rommer is a hood, Vinnie."

"In your opinion," Cronin said, nonplused. "Incidentally, I believe I am entitled to a telephone call. I would like to call Mr. Rommer."

"You want a shyster down here, huh?"

"Mr. Rommer probably is worrying about my absence from the club. He was not present when your partner came after me."

"No calls, Vinnie. Later maybe."

"I can be out of here in thirty minutes, Sergeant—and you can be in trouble."

"No calls. Relax. This isn't going to hurt—unless you actually did kill Penelope Hern. How come you don't wear your gun?"

Cronin drew in smoke, exhaled, decided to relax. "It is left in the club at Mr. Rommer's request. He prefers that I not wear it. It's there for—emergencies."

"Like?"

"A hit. There are people in the city, Sergeant, who believe in robbing others."

"Unscrupulous characters, wouldn't you say?"

"Sometimes they just don't think."

"Yeah. You're muscle, huh?"

"A floor manager."

"That's a fancy title."

"I like it."

"How long have you worked for Rommer?"

"Almost four years."

"Then how come you're clean. We should have something on you in four years."

"I'm peculiar that way. A police record would keep me awake nights."

"Are you peculiar about picking off some other guy's wife, too?"

"Harry didn't tell you that."

"What did he tell us?"

"That I happened to be around when he finally left Penny."

"With a yen for her."

"We had mutual interest."

"Nice dame, huh?"

"I liked her."

"Didn't it bother you, her being married?"

"Why would it?"

"I understand you two were hitting it off before the Herns split."

"It happened that way, yes."

"I know some husbands who would blow your head off."

"Not Harry. He's an understanding man."

"Yeah."

"Look, Sergeant, Harry and Penny had something between them once. That I grant. But it was gone when I became acquainted with them. Their separation in reality was merely a matter of time and initiative."

"You and this Penny ever talk about marriage?"

"Never. It wasn't like that between us."

"Just what the hell was it like?"

"I told you, we had mutual interests."

"That I can imagine."

"We liked the same kind of music, too."

"Come off it, Cronin!"

Cronin grinned, took a final puff from his cigarette, leaned forward and butted the cigarette in the half-filled ashtray on Lieutenant Gifford's desk. "Is all of this boring you, Lieutenant?" he asked politely. "You look sleepy."

Gifford didn't say a word.

You cool ugly son, Crocker thought. "Did Mrs. Hern normally sleep naked?" he shot at the neat man.

"You should have asked Harry," Cronin answered with a crooked smile.

"I did."

"So you didn't have to ask me."

"I wish I could tie you three, Vinnie—you and the Herns—and feel comfortable."

"A man does have problems, doesn't he?"

"Maybe your real interest is—was—" Crocker fumbled and Cronin laughed softly. "Was and is in the Dalton money," Crocker finished angrily.

"There's a pile of it, I understand," Cronin admitted casually, "but I guess you're going to have to talk to Al about that now."

"I will. Just how the hell did you meet Al, Vinnie? That's something Harry didn't tell us."

"Through Harry and Penny. Al dropped into the apartment occasionally."

"When you were there."

"How else could I meet him, Sergeant? I had to be there."

"It strikes me that you, Harry and this Al have a rather tight-knit comradeship going."

"We like to drink together. We find a certain solace in forgetting our troubles together."

"Troubles like?"

Cronin shrugged. "Penny."

"Penelope Hern was trouble for each of you?"

"She could be difficult, Sergeant."

"Run over that—with details."

Cronin sighed. "It isn't complicated. Harry was out of love with her, but married to her—as he undoubtedly told you. I was enjoying her company, but found her to be an extremely jealous individual. And Al—" He paused and sat in blank-faced thought for a few seconds. "I guess you'll also have to get that from Al."

"I want it from you, Vinnie."

Cronin shook his head and was stubborn. "Al."

Crocker breathed heavily and the sound coming from his nostrils was loud in the sudden stillness of the office. He snorted, cutting off the rasp, and then he said, "Tell me about Monday night."

"Monday. Let's see." Cronin looked at the ceiling in feigned thought. "I believe it was clear and crisp."

"Damn you, Cronin! I want to hear about this three-men drunk!"

Cronin recalled Monday night in a soft, unruffled voice and then he asked, "Does that conform with what Harry told you? I don't want to get Harry in trouble."

It conformed, but Crocker was in no mood to give Cronin the benefit of smugness with an answer. He growled, "You said Penelope Hern was a jealous woman."

"That's right," Cronin nodded. "By nature. She didn't like it when I talked about other women or when some dame happened to pay particular attention to me."

"And this happened, huh?"

"Occasionally."

"Is that how come you two had a beef last Thursday night? Another dame?"

"Bless Mr. Fillmore," Cronin said. "The creep."

"Let's have it, Vinnie."

"There's a dame, a kid, really, a

college kid, who's been coming into the club. She's a looker, okay, but she's a nut. Man-crazy. And she's been on my back. Bugging me to take her off into the hinterland. But she's jail-bait and I've steered clear. Trouble came when she somehow found out about Penny. Thursday this damn fool kid had the guts to call Penny and tell her to get off my back, leave me alone, free me. 'She was a married woman. She had a man'. Penny blew. That's all."

"Blew how?"

"Told me to get out and not come back until she sent for me."

"So you got."

"I got."

"And she didn't send for you."

"The hell with her."

"Nips a man's pride, doesn't it, Vinnie?"

"There are plenty of dames around, Sargeant."

"Including college kids."

"Now you go to hell."

"Who is she?"

"She isn't involved. I've never been out with her in my life."

"Yeah? Let's do some twisting. Let's say, Vinnie, you have been out with her. Let's say she's suddenly—and mysteriously, of course—pregnant. Or maybe it's just old fashioned love between you two. Let's say you and this kid want to hit the altar. Let's say you explain all of this to Penelope Hern—last Thursday night. And let's say Penelope Hern blows a gasket, maybe even threatens you in some manner. People have killed for less."

"Sergeant, I want to make my phone call."

"Do it in the squad room, Cronin."

Sergeant Crocker's abrupt dismissal surprised both Cronin and Lieutenant Gifford. Cronin sat silent for amoment, boring into him from narrowed, hard eyes, and then abruptly he softened, smiled, and left the office. Gifford frowned at Crocker.

"Did I miss something?" Crocker asked flatly.

"I don't know," Gifford said slowly.

Sergeant Pierce appeared in the open doorway.

"Let Cronin make a call," Crocker growled. "And how's Dalton? Can he talk sense?"

"Coffee has him on his feet, Sergeant."

"Bring him."

Crocker got a fresh whiff of Alvin Dalton as the drink-puffed man entered the office with hesitant steps and dropped onto the chair.

"You should try soap and water sometime, Dalton," Crocker said sourly. "Instead of rum."

"I happen to like rum, Sergeant."

Dalton was thick in the chest and flabby. His hands were fleshy, the fingers short and fat. He wore a scuffed leather jacket and old wool trousers. He answered Crocker's questions bluntly. His story of how he had met Vinnie Cronin, the close

friendship that had developed with Vinnie and his brother-in-law, the Monday night drinking bout confirmed.

Then Crocker asked, "Why did you kill your sister, Al?"

"Because of the money."

"Yeah? The way I hear it, money with the Daltons isn't important. The Daltons are heeled."

"One Dalton was heeled, Sergeant. Penelope."

"Not Alvin?"

"Alvin is the refuse of the Dalton family. He has been all of his life. Alvin wouldn't remain at the university. Alvin wouldn't work. Alvin drank. Alvin made a play for every woman he met. He played the horses as well. That was while Alvin Dalton, senior was alive."

"Very interesting. Go on.

"Death brought only a transfer of the money and power to Alvin's sister."

"You mean you were cut off."

"*Flat* is the word. Dear father left everything to Penelope—including the chore of doling out seventy-five dollars weekly to brother Al. I'm thirty-two years old, Sergeant, and I was still on a weekly allowance."

"Which grated."

"You might say it did. But I made a point of remaining drunk most of the time, so I couldn't remember."

"Until Monday."

"Yeah."

"Monday you decided to become a millionaire."

"All I had to do was kill Penelope. Of course, I'm going to have a helluva court fight to get the money, but I'll get it—eventually."

"Know something, Al? I think you're a goddamn liar."

Alvin Dalton grimaced. "I'm sorry to hear that. That must mean you think either Harry or Vinnie killed Penelope. And, really, they're nice guys. You'll go a long way before you find another pair like them."

"I'll buy that in spades."

"But you're missing my point. I did kill Penelope. I strangled her and I don't feel the slightest pang of remorse."

Crocker thumbed him into the squad room and stared bleakly at the lieutenant. "Where the hell are we, Giff?" he asked.

"Up against three nuts who are thumbing their noses at us—and possible execution."

Sergeant Pierce joined them and they embarked on the long, tedious road of reconstruction. They returned to the starting point, a hysterical complaint phoned in at two-twenty-seven that afternoon by a man named Fillmore who owned and operated a respectable apartment house in a respectable neighborhood.

A tenant was dead and he, Fillmore, could not get into the apartment.

A patrol car will be dispatched immediately, Mr. Fillmore.

Hurry.

Pity Mr. Fillmore. Another solid citizen who, through the course of life, had failed to observe a simple truism: cops always hustle to a death scene even though death itself has already eliminated the necessity of saving a few minutes by weaving and roaring—red lights flashing, sirens screaming—through startled and already-harrowed taxpayers.

A patrol car had hurried. And a patrolman had made a second call to the detective squad room in Central Police Headquarters. And the detectives had their starting point.

So now what did they have?

They had a dead woman who had been the wife of one man, the paramour of another, the brother of a third, and loved from a distance by a fourth. When you got right down to her, you saw that she must have been quite a dame—alive. But you had her lying slain on the carpeting inside a plush apartment.

You had her dead and locked inside the apartment. Windows locked. An only door double locked by a conventional knob snap and a conventional chain. What you really had was an enigma. How the hell could anyone leave an apartment and fasten a chain lock from the outside?

Face it, detectives. You've got some smart joker who killed and has confused the cops. Because this kind of thing—dames found murdered inside a totally locked apartment—just doesn't happen in real life. That's mystery book jazz.

So maybe you'd better get yourself an author to explain the jazz.

All right. You've got an author. An egotistical "literary craftsman" who also just happens to be the dead dame's husband—although "out of love" with her, and that's a quote, detectives—and quite capable of confusion.

Point: You are assuming the deceased was so fashioned by someone she knew intimately, i.e.; the deceased was known to have a peculiar fear of being alone and normally barricaded herself when in her apartment. She was a woman who slept in the nude and she was found dead in a black, veil-like negligee, nothing more. The hour of death has been fixed between ten and eleven o'clock on last Monday night by a competent authority and you can surmise the deceased had retired by said hour and left her bed (later found turned down by cops) to answer a summons at her door. She had apparently recognized said individual as being someone who would not be awed, or embarrassed by her lack of attire, and admitted him voluntarily. Further—to nail this premise, and it should be nailed—no other tenants in the same apartment house had reported hearing screams or any other disturbance between ten and eleven o'clock Monday night. Conclusion: Penel-

ope Hern was slain by someone who had been, or was, a close associate.

Now: Do you have such a person who equally could be a potential killer?

You do. You have an estranged husband. An author.

Is the husband physically and mentally capable of bringing on death by strangulation?

Mentally, yes. Physically, there must be caution. The man has only one hand. Still, if he attacked secretly to gain a decided initial advantage, he has the strength in that one hand to slay.

All right, the husband is capable of murder.

Did he have the opportunity?

He did. He claims to have been with companions Monday night, but he did not offer an alibi for the hour of death. In fact, he pointed out that he had ample opportunity to kill. Worse, he pointed out that he had killed.

But did the husband have a motive?

He did if you wanted to term him an unmitigated liar.

Suppose we try that on one for size.

Husband as a liar. He has said the intimate relationship between his friend, Vincent Cronin, and his wife, Penelope Hern, was no concern to him. He has said he took the initiative and walked out on his wife. Reverse this. The existing relationship between Vincent Cronin

and Penelope Hern tormented the husband beyond endurance. The husband did not walk out. He was ejected.

And add to this, detectives: Penelope Hern was loaded with dough. Let's see, the tune was three and one-half million at one time. Suppose Penelope Hern had been supporting her husband, found a new love and said the hell with hubby? Persons with access to three and a half million can afford to do this. Could this make hubby angry? Some guys would kill over such a trifle.

Okay, husband can be a murderer.

How about the boyfriend? He, too, says he has killed. Such cooperation certainly is a new twist. Cops rarely find so many killers in one murder case.

But is the boyfriend mentally and physically capable of violence? He is. Mentally, by nature. The guy's a hood and physically he's constructed like a professional fullback.

Opportunity?

Same as husband of deceased.

Motive?

He's having a not-so-clandestine affair with a married woman and

he says he has a kid on his back. A college girl. But what if he is riding the college girl's back? What if the college girl has told him to shuck the matron or get off? And what if the matron doesn't want to be shucked?

Conclusion: Boyfriend might kill.

And then there is a rum-soaked brother. The admitted black sheep of the Dalton clan and also an admitted killer. Lord, won't they ever stop coming?

Mentally and physically capable of slaying?

Border line in both areas. Mentally capable if pressed.

Damnit, millions of dollars is plenty of pressure.

And beneath all of that flab there probably remains a certain amount of strength.

Opportunity? See husband, boyfriend.

But it's impossible to be sure about his motive. Will it stand? After all, there's only his say-so that he could inherit. He admitted quite readily that the inheritance might involve a helluva court fight. Let's say there's a much stronger possibility that he will not inherit and that he knows he will not inherit. Then, by murder, all he has accomplished is slicing off his own nose. He's killed his only known source of income, meager as it might be. What the hell does that do to his motive?

Like the cookie – his motive crumbles. But why the hell do you have to have such a speculative mind at this point? Haven't we got enough trouble?

Okay, brother is a potential killer.

Well, that's it. The run of the lot.

We're forgetting someone.

Yeah?

Fillmore, the landlord. Here's a guy who probably wouldn't swat a fly because. Well, in the first place, he abhors violence in any degree and, in the second, he just might not have the strength to slay a fly. Don't under-rate this guy. He has all the earmarks of being a brutish killer.

Yeah, but did he have opportunity?

He owns the joint where the minion died. He has keys to every door in the place. He and the deceased were more than just lessor-lessee—at least, in the lessor's mind.

Yeah, that's right. The guy was helplessly, haplessly in love.

But is he a killer?

In a rage, man can draw strength —physically and mentally—from an unknown source.

Know something, Sergeant? You're a philosopher.

I'd rather be home in bed.

LIEUTENANT GIFFORD broke it up. He lit a cigar. "Now you're really making sense, Gil," he said to Crocker. "It's been a rough day. We're getting cobwebs in the head.

We'll hit it fresh in the morning—when we can progress."

"What about our three friends out there in the squad room?"

"We'll hold them overnight without booking," Gifford said.

"I've got a hunch Vinnie Cronin already has a shyster hot-footin' it in this direction."

"All right, we'll attempt to hold them overnight without booking. I'll sweat that. You guys get the hell out of here. You look ready to dig graves. Your own."

"I love you, Lieutenant," Crocker said. "You're so sympathetic."

"So does my wife. But not for the same reason."

Sergeant Anderson had already vacated the office. Crocker and Pierce followed his trail of cigarette smoke across the squad room without looking at the three men who claimed to be killers. Crocker, for one, had had enough of them for one night.

"Now all I have to do," he grumbled as he hit the street door and the falling snow, "is catch a damn bus."

"Let me give you a lift, Sergeant," Pierce said.

Crocker hunched deep into his coat. "It's out of your way."

"Come on," Pierce said easily.

Crocker hesitated. Pierce knew the relationship between them was slightly less than cordial. He knew it was a relationship wrapped almost alone in the bonds of their work. But here he was, making an overture normally associated with closer companionship. What the hell, was he attempting to mellow the bridge?

The raw night nipped Crocker. The snow was thickening. He shuddered and briefly visualized himself standing on a wind-swept corner waiting for the city bus. The mental picture was enough. He went down the steps and around the corner with Pierce and got into the young detective's dented sedan. It was cold in the sedan, but he was out of the wind.

"Want to stop for a beer?" Pierce asked casually as he coaxed the sputtering car into the lean line of night traffic.

"I'd rather have four ounces of bourbon in a cup of steaming coffee."

"Can do," Pierce said affably. "At my place. Nancy will still be up."

Crocker jerked but steeled himself against looking at Pierce. What was this? Damnit, his words were meant to be idle. To fill a gap. They had been a sour slap at the night and March and the snow and the cold.

"Well?" Pierce asked.

Crocker squinted straight ahead through the wet splosh of the windshield wipers at the dazzling flakes of snow slashing toward them. "Maybe I'd better skip tonight, Sergeant. I'm beat."

Pierce chuckled. "Aw come on.

You found a murder once by going to my place. Remember?"

"Too clearly."

"Nancy still talks about how you took that crazy gun away from that character."

"It was reflex. Nothing more."

"She likes you, Sergeant. She asks about you. She keeps nagging at me: 'Hugh, why don't you bring Sergeant Crocker here for a beer sometime?' "

"Drive," Crocker grunted, settling lower in the seat."

Damnit, why did this guy keep trying to get next to him? He had a helluva fine wife, sure. A nice little gal who would make Castro feel welcome on her threshhold. But therein was the rub. With his Nancy patiently waiting day after day for him to come through the front door, why did Pierce have to have an interest in other women? True, he was a cautious dude. And, true, maybe he, Crocker, sometimes read more into the looks and the gestures that passed between the young detective and the women they encountered than was actually there, but—

Warmth was pouring from the sedan's heater to bathe his feet now and he blanked his mind to bask in the comfort.

Pierce lived in an apartment building in a modest-income neighborhood. They rode the self-service elevator up to the third floor and Pierce took a ring of keys from his pocket, selected a key, and inserted it in a door knob. He flipped the knob, the door opened slightly and then banged against his face. They could see the chain of the chain-lock stretched taut across the opening. Pierce gave Crocker a sheepish grin.

"My wife is asleep on the couch."

Pierce turned back to the opening as if to call out and then Crocker saw him stiffen. Crocker experienced an instant presentiment.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Sergeant," Pierce said slowly in a tone just above a whisper, "maybe I've got something. Maybe I've—"

He let the words dribble off and he attempted to wedge his hand into the door opening, attempted to finger the taut chain. He managed to squeeze his hand through the opening.

Crocker saw his fingers work. The tips found the chain, but Pierce was now at the end of his rope. His wrist was cocked at an odd angle. His fingertips had a firm grip on the chain, all right. But there was no give in the chain and there was no possible way to stretch it further.

Pierce looked over his shoulder at Crocker. His eyes gleamed with new knowledge. "I have big hands, Sergeant," he said. "So does Hern, Cronin and Dalton. But what about Fillmore?"

"Let's go," Crocker snapped.

But they didn't go. Pierce yelped with sudden surprise and pain as a weight on the other side of the door

smashed against his wrist and trapped it in the opening.

"Hey, Nancy," he rattled. "It's me! Hugh!"

"Well, you big lug, why didn't you—"

She cut off the words and slid over until they could see her face in the opening. Her eyes were bright with concern.

Pierce squeezed his hand free. The door moved toward them, and there was a click of the chain being freed. Then they were staring on the young, firmly voluptuous Nancy with the exotic face. The concern left her eyes when she saw Crocker, and saw as well that her husband was simply kneading his wrist with no look of agony on his face.

"Sergeant," she said with reaching warmth. "I've been telling Hugh to bring you around sometime for a—"

"Nancy, we've got to run," Pierce broke in, already moving down the hall.

"But—"

"Business," he threw at her over his shoulder.

Pierce piloted the sedan fast but with care over the wet, sometimes ice-coated streets. He remained silent, concentrated on driving. Crocker welcomed the silence. His thoughts were churning. Pierce had hit on something, all right. Maybe this was their break.

Herbert Fillmore was home, but the presence of two grim-faced policemen on his threshhold disturbed him and the disturbance was mirrored on his narrow face.

Crocker was brusk. "Get your master key, Fillmore. We want to take a look at Mrs. Hern's door."

"But you've sealed—"

"Get it."

They broke the seal on the door while Fillmore stood slightly behind them, shuffling his weight nervously from one foot to the other.

"Okay, open up," Crocker said, giving the little man elbow room.

Fillmore swung the door open on the darkened apartment. Crocker found the light switch. He slid behind the door and studied the dangling hasp. Thank God, the screws they had ripped from the door in breaking inside that afternoon were still caught in the hasp. He got out a pocketknife and screwed the hasp back into the door. The hasp was loose, but it would hold enough for what they needed.

"All right, Fillmore," he said flatly. "Stand outside the door and reach through the opening and catch the chain in your fingers."

The little man wanted to protest, but he was intelligent enough to remain silent. He and Pierce stood in the hall and Crocker pushed the door toward them. Fillmore caught the knob and easily slid his small hand through the opening.

"Get the chain," Crocker snapped, his eyes mesmerized on the little man's delicate fingers.

Fillmore's fingers found the chain.

"Now fit the chain in the hasp."

Crocker saw the fingers of the little man stiffen, then slowly the hand twisted and the fingers lifted the chain to fumble over the hasp. And then—Fillmore ran out of chain length. His wrist in the opening prevented enough closing of the door to enable him to gain the length he needed to slide the blunt end of the chain into the hasp niche.

Crocker knew sudden defeat. "Okay," he said wearily. "We've got what we want."

Fillmore's fingers dropped the chain. Crocker opened the door and shook his head on a sober Pierce. "No dice. And if he can't do it with his hands, we have to count out the other three. It was a damn good thought anyway, Sergeant."

"How about a guy without a hand?" Pierce asked tightly.

Crocker stood rooted.

"The guy is clever with the device," Pierce pressed. "Even he admits it. And the device is slender. He could close the door almost all of the way from this side and still be able to reach inside."

LADY LUCK was riding on their side this cold, blustery, snowy March night. Or maybe it was Lieutenant Gifford's inborn stubbornness. Gifford was still battling a shrill-voiced shyster when Crocker and Pierce rolled into the squad room, and the Three Musketeers were still occupying chairs, now sullen and resentful under the guarding eyes of detectives on the night trick.

Gifford was fighting hard, but he needed assistance. And Crocker loved this kind of combat. He stepped into the shyster and banged his palms hard against the man's shoulders, driving him back a few steps.

A hush fell on the squad room. A shroud descended. No one said anything. All eyes were on a heavily breathing Sergeant Crocker—a guy who had apparently gone off his nut. Crocker had had the gall to slam a lawyer. Only kooks—or a guy with angels on his shoulders—slammed lawyers. Everybody knew that. Even cops.

And you could stare all night and you weren't going to find any angels riding Sergeant Crocker's shoulders. You could watch, and you could see Crocker really going haywire. You could see him grab a fistful of shirt and coat worn by a

one-armed guy, and you could see the one-armed guy literally come flying up off the chair he'd been occupying.

You could see Crocker spin the guy across the room and bang him through a doorway into the Lieutenant's office. You could see the Lieutenant recover and, with Sergeant Pierce, stomp after Crocker. You could see a shocked and sputtering shyster stumble toward the same office only to have a door slammed against his long nose. You could hear the shyster scream agonized threats of dire consequence.

You could see some guy named Dalton who might be wanted for murder bolt and become tripped by a cop's big foot as he attempted to flee the room. You could see another guy named Cronin who also might be wanted for murder stand up, light a cigarette and scowl on the shrilling shyster.

Man, this was the craziest night yet in the Detective Division of Central Police Headquarters. Sergeant Gilbert Crocker – veteran cop, dedicated plodder with narry a derogatory mark on his enviable record of service to the citizenry– had popped his cork.

It was something to be chronicled in the annals of police work.

And inside Lieutenant Gifford's office:

Wednesday quickly became Thursday. And night finally became day. Outside, it was cold. Outside, it continued to snow. Inside, the cops hammered. Inside, they prodded, poked, conjectured, surmised, concluded. Inside, Harry Hern, egotist, author, husband, finally broke down.

All right, he'd killed her. She'd needed killing.

Why, Harry? Vinnie Cronin?

Hell, no–not Vinnie Cronin. Taxes.

Taxes?

She couldn't believe a man might fall out of love with her. Not with her–the beautiful, desirable Penelope Dalton. Penelope Dalton, who had inherited millions of dollars.

But where do the taxes fit, Harry?

I've been cheating on my returns for years and she knew. The vindictive little witch reported me. There's a reward, you know.

We didn't know.

Hell, yes, the government pays a reward if you report a cheater and they can make it stand up.

So your wife reported you for a reward, huh? Her with all those millions. And you–

The reward is pittance, gentlemen. My wife reported me because she wanted to make me sweat.

Hmmm. And are you sweating, Harry?

I have a nagging suspicion it is going to become worse. On the other hand, it can not all be loss.

Yeah?

Well, I can always write a book about what goes through a man's

mind when he knows he is to die.

Yeah, I guess there's some truth in that.

Gentlemen, it will easily be an outstanding work of literature.

I am to die. By the hand of the plain-clothed minions of the law, I am to die.

It's by *your* hand, Harry.

Point. Touche. Great.

Harry Hern was taken downstairs for booking and Crocker settled deeper in the chair in front of Lieutenant Gifford's desk. He was tired, dog tired. But the fatigue didn't count now. A man could rest in the satisfaction of having successfully completed a rigorous task.

Sergeant Pierce said wearily, "I need a cup of coffee."

He left the office. Sergeant Gilbert Crocker followed him with his eyes. But it was several seconds before Lieutenant Gifford asked, "What do you think, Gil?"

"You know damn well what I think, Giff. That kid is going to be a damn good detective—someday."

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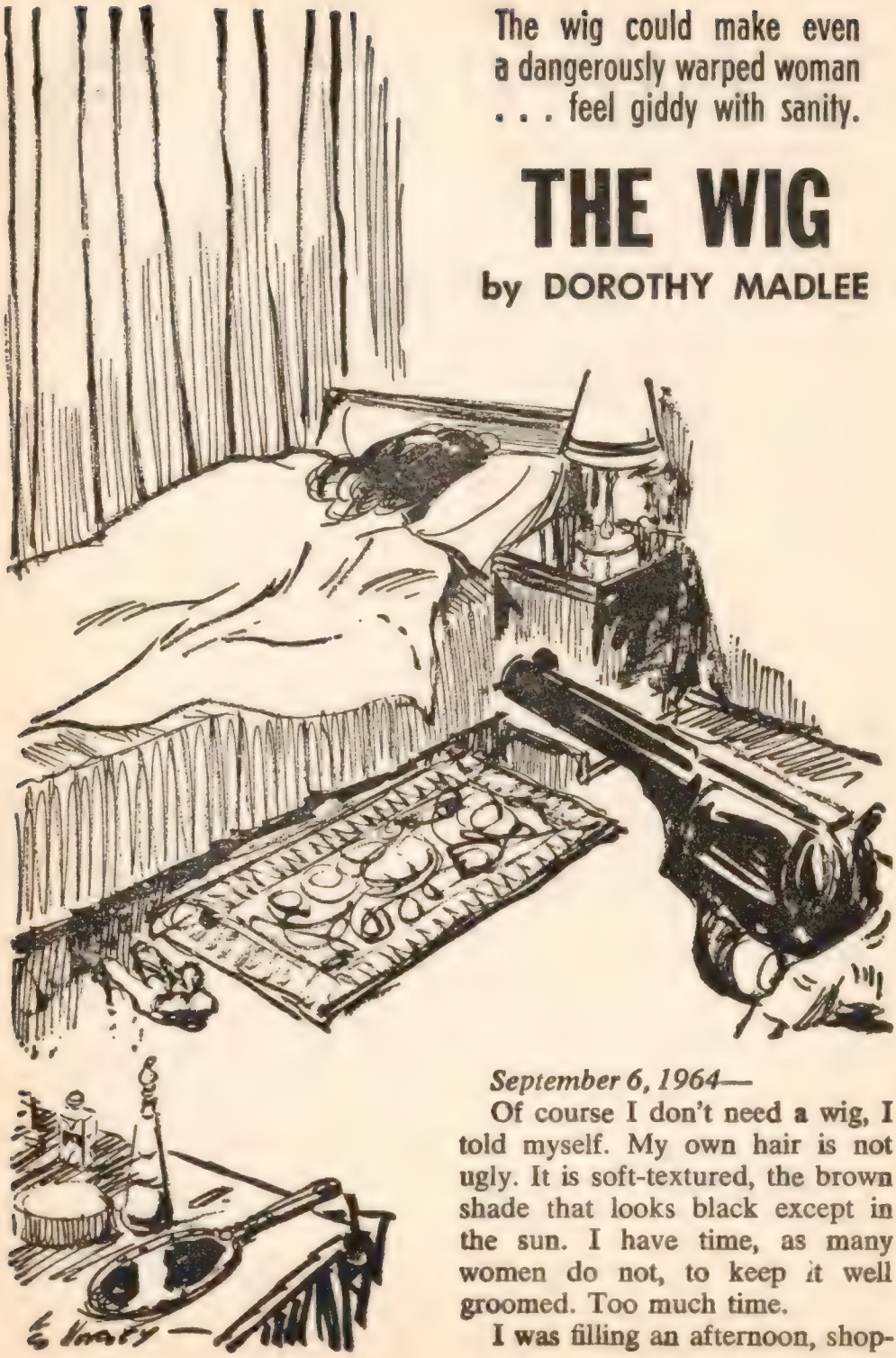
The wig could make even a dangerously warped woman . . . feel giddy with sanity.

THE WIG

by DOROTHY MADLEE



September 6, 1964—

Of course I don't need a wig, I told myself. My own hair is not ugly. It is soft-textured, the brown shade that looks black except in the sun. I have time, as many women do not, to keep it well groomed. Too much time.

I was filling an afternoon, shop-

ping idly and feeling depressed, when I passed the wig shop. I turned back and went in.

First I tried a platinum wig. It had a siren-in-cellophane look, not right for Lynn Wilson, unloved wife who holds her childless ten-year-old marriage together by the crude humorless device of refusing Howard Wilson a divorce.

The saleswoman's lank hair obviously was her own, I noted as she brought me a red-blonde wig. I refused to let her try it on me. I had no wish to imitate the petite redhead who is Howard's current love.

I've known about her for some time, even before I saw them together accidentally as I dined at the Richelieu with Arthur Jennings. Arthur works for Howard's firm and is acting head of the sales force during my husband's ever more frequent business trips. Arthur is a long-term widower. He is lonely, I suppose. He always invites both of us, but usually my husband is too busy to be entertained. Sometimes, at Howard's suggestion, I go out with Arthur alone.

"Perhaps you'd like your wig to match your own color," Miss Mouldilocks suggested.

Before I had finished saying 'No' she was adjusting it, combing strands of my own hair into it and leaving some of my natural hairline exposed. Then she stepped back and observed me with wonder, as if she had just found me, a living jewel, glittering in a trash barrel.

"Marvelous" she inhaled. "It's you—but enhanced, intensified!"

I looked into the close-up mirror. In another glass halfway across the room I caught sight of my full-length figure as it straightened and poised itself, high-headed and suddenly vital. I am a tall woman, rather thin, and too strong-boned for the pale small-featured oval of my face, and the baby-fine hair.

The hair I saw was thick, each strand strong and crackling with life. It was styled much like my own, falling nearly to the shoulders, the ends curved under. But this smooth, luxuriant wig set sparks to my hazel eyes and touched my face and the lines of my body with a look of new vitality.

I recalled phrases I had read about the seductiveness of woman's hair. Now I understood them.

I wrote out a check. The wig was expensive, but I must say Howard seldom quarrels over money. He should not, since the income from my father's estate is slightly larger than his sales executive's five figure salary.

I thought guiltily of the unknown woman who had sold this wonderful hair. Would she be desperately poor, and now as heartbroken as Sampson over her loss? I asked the saleswoman.

"Don't worry," she smiled. "No undernourished woman could have grown such hair. This is from Italy —perhaps from a girl just entering a convent, or a young woman

who decided she'd prefer to wear her hair short."

She was fitting the wig onto its holder, a head-shaped form molded in off-white foam plastic. Its front sloped facelessly between wings of hair, to a tube that looked like a narrow neck. This fitted into a detachable frame that held the form upright, as shoulders brace a head. She placed the whole thing in a chaste round-sided box.

"Always keep the wig on the form when you aren't wearing it," she cautioned as she handed me the box.

On impulse I stopped at a stationery shop on the way to the parking lot, and bought this diary. I had intended for a long time to do this, but I kept forgetting it. The early Victorian desk that sits in my bed-sittingroom has a secret drawer, so cleverly hidden that I would never have known of it if the grandmother who willed me the desk had not previously shown me the drawer and the concealed catch that opens it.

It simply cries to contain a lady's diary, covered in white with embossed violets. Inside should be romantic confidences in delicate old-fashioned writing, some pages tear-stained.

I'm not good at spidery script, but I could try. Perhaps acquiring the wig had now given me the vague feeling that something still might happen to me that would be worth recording.

The parking attendant brought out my Porsche and I drove home. It was just after four. Sylvie, our maid, had gone home. We do not employ a cook. Howard seldom is at home for meals. I find it simpler to make my own and, on the rare occasions when we entertain, to hire caterers.

Sylvie works regular hours and has two weeks of paid vacation each year. I must keep in mind, she will be away the last week of this month and the first week of October.

I hurried upstairs, and dropped my coat and opened the wig-box. The telephone rang just as I set the wig on its head-shaped form on top of a tall antique cabinet which stands diagonally across one corner of my room.

There was a familiar vibrancy in the voice that came over the line.

"Lynn? Arthur Jennings."

"Arthur! How nice!"

"Howard's secretary says his plane is due at five-forty five. I thought I might meet it, then take you both to dinner at the Frenchman's. Or do you have plans?"

"I haven't, and I'd love it," I said. "I can't answer for Howard. You know how busy he is."

"Would you like to come along to the airport? I'll pick you up."

"No, I'll wait here, thanks," I told him. Howard does not welcome surprise appearances by his wife.

"Fine." I glanced at the wig on

its faceless head and I smiled into the telephone. "I'll be ready."

I have not always been such a recluse that a simple invitation to dinner would send my spirits soaring. My social connections dwindled after Howard stopped going out with me. I hated being an extra woman. I could have taken up club work, or some such thing that lets you mingle without an escort, but somehow I never did.

September 7—

Howard and Arthur arrived just as I went downstairs. I had done my face with more care than usual, put on the low-backed black sheath and my good pearls. And of course I wore the wig.

Howard looked tired and about as irritable as usual. He said, "Hello, Lynn," and brushed my cheek with a near-kiss. He started toward the stairway without putting down his suitcases.

"Thanks again for the dinner invitation," he said from a lower step to Arthur. "I'll have to take a rain-check, but why don't you take Lynn anyway?"

"Please," Arthur said to me. He was staring with the kind of expression that can knit up the ravelled ego of a neglected wife. You look wonderful tonight, Lynn. Different, but I can't quite tell why."

"It might be my new wig," I said, smiling. "Would you like a drink whille I run up for my gloves and purse?"

"No. I'll wait." His gaze followed me up the stairway and I felt an impulse to sway my hips, but delicately. I restrained it.

I paused in passing the open door of Howard's bedroom. He was pawing among ties in the top drawer of his dresser. I noticed the dull-satin gleam of his revolver, glimpsed at the edge of a mound of socks.

I recalled the time when he taught me to shoot quite accurately, and insisted I must keep the weapon beside me at night when he was away. I loved his concern, although secretly I hated guns. I held back a sigh. It seemed a long time ago that I was treasured.

"May I help?" I asked him.

"No." He did not look up from the drawer.

Once Arthur and I had left the house, the evening was fun. Arthur is good company, and I was more lively than usual. I caught several admiring glances, or at least mildly approving ones, in the restaurant and later at a place we dropped into for a special brandy.

September 14—

Howard noticed the wig a few days after I bought it. I was not wearing it.

He had paused at my door to tell me he was leaving next day for New York. I had gone to bed early. My reading light was focussed on my book and the rest of the room was dim. The wig on its form was on top of the corner cabinet.

"What in hell is that?" Howard asked.

"My new wig. You've seen me wear it several times."

I am not ordinarily a mystic, but there were times—Howard and I were deeply in love then—when I seemed to know his thoughts before he spoke them. Now I looked momentarily through his eyes.

He saw the pale pseudo-face framed in springy dark hair. He looked at my face, framed in hair less luxuriant but brushed so it fell in a similar dark, end-curved mane.

With disgust, he thought how alike the two dull blank ovals were. I felt him thinking that.

I wonder if intense dislike, too, can be a carrier for telepathy?

September 18—

I must—I will put a stop to this new hysteria.

For days the wig has remained on its form. I have gone out only on brief errands.

On three successive evenings I have entered the dimness of my room and encountered my own face, glamorized by the lavish hair, regarding me from the foam plastic form that held my wig. Each time the illusion vanished when I had turned on all the rose-shaded lights.

Last night I snatched up the form, set it into its box and shoved it into my closet.

Tonight when I walked into my room I glanced inadvertently into my mirror as I crossed to turn on the lamps. The reflected face was a blank, featureless white oval.

This must stop. Perhaps I shall see a psychiatrist.

Arthur Jennings called today, inviting me to dinner and the theatre. I have dressed and made up carefully and I am wearing my wig. I am waiting now for his ring at the door.

September 19—

I told Arthur about my delusions. He was sympathetic, and he advised me to go out more. Today he sent flowers and he has telephoned twice. It is reassuring, but I shall not go out with him too often. I must avoid scandal.

Sylvie leaves next week for her vacation. Doing all the housework may help keep my mind off my silly fantasies.

September 26—

Howard came back from New York, but he left almost immediately for a business trip to Alaska. As I suspected, the small vivacious redhead is away too, ostensibly on a vacation in the West Indies.

September 27—

It has been almost a week since the 'change of faces' delusion occurred last. I believe I have overcome it. I feel stronger now, more hopeful.

Arthur's attention has helped me.

I have decided to give Howard a divorce.

October 3—

Howard came back, but I have had no opportunity to tell him. I know my decision will please him.

But he came unexpectedly after I had retired, went straight to his room and I heard the lock click. Today he left early, came back in the afternoon with his secretary and they worked for two hours in his den. His plane for San Francisco leaves at eight, he told me. He put his suitcases into his car and drove off with his secretary.

Arthur called and invited me to a late movie, and I accepted gladly. He will call for me at nine. I dressed unhurriedly. My hair was freshly done, so I did not put on the wig. I felt unusually relaxed. It was a relief to have made a decision.

I was ready a full hour early. On impulse I lifted the wig box from the closet, took out the wig on its form and set the base on the cabinet.

"There'll be no more tricks," I told the blank face.

Feeling happily childish, I unscrewed the tubular neck from its base, carried the head and laid it on my pillow. With another pillow I made a vaguely me-shaped bulge under the rumpled covers, and tucked the pink sheet about the neck.

"There!" I said aloud. "You go to bed early for a change because there's nothing to do. See how it feels!"

I tossed a negligent wisp of hair across the face, turned out the lights and stood at the door. In the glow from the hallway the effect was realistic. It was Lynn Wilson, sleeping in her bed.

I wondered briefly why I had succumbed to so infantile an impulse. Probably therapy, I answered myself. I'd been too solemn. Now either I was quite crazy or I was saner than I'd been in months. I felt quite giddy with sanity.

I was about to go downstairs when a key scraped in the side door and steps entered the house. I was not alarmed. No matter how quiet, my ears always recognize Howard's tread. He must have missed his plane, I thought, and was on the point of calling to him when it occurred to me how silly I would appear, dressed to go out, with the wig form in my bed like a sleeping me.

Almost silently, Howard was mounting the stairs. I crossed the room and slipped behind the diagonal cabinet. I started to crouch out of sight but stopped. From the door my head, the neck even with the top of the cabinet, would seem to be the wig form.

He stopped at the door, stepped in and poised, one hand raised. Something he held in it made a snicking sound and the headshape jerked on my pillow. I bit back a scream and held still.

Howard was clawing through my dresser drawers and scattering the contents of my jewel box. He ran to my closet, ripped out dresses and flung them onto the floor. He

stopped at the door to stare briefly at the bed.

He ran down the stairs and I heard a clashing of glass at the rear of the house, then a motor starting. Through my window I saw a dark-colored car, not Howard's, slipping away without lights.

Shakily, I picked up an overturned lamp and switched it on. The room looked as if burglars had ransacked it frantically, panicked and escaped without taking much of their loot.

I wavered over to the bed. Below the front hairline of my wig was a smooth round hole. I picked up the form. A bullet had passed through the foam plastic head, torn out a swatch of hair and driven the ends deep into my pink linen covered, foam rubber pillow.

I swayed, sat down on a chair and rested my head between my knees. When my upper lip stopped sweating coldly I got up. My bones felt soggy but I could stand.

The doorbell rang. I checked my

COMPLETE—NEXT MONTH—

THE SLEEPER CAPER

A Shell Scott Novelet

The girl was so beautiful Scott didn't quite know in which direction the guns were pointing . . . until the spotlight hit him.

by RICHARD S. PRATHER

The fabulous popularity of Shell Scott has made him more than just another private-eye who has reached the heights. In his own special way he occupies an entire, bullet-proof suite at the top.

appearance in the mirror. Under the makeup my face seemed not much whiter than its normal pallor. I ran a comb through my hair, left my disheveled bedroom and closed the door. I steadied myself once, my hand clutching the bannister, then I straightened and walked down the stairs to meet Arthur.

October 5—

Howard is due back from San Francisco tonight, his secretary has told Arthur. I have been quite busy in the two days since he left.

I did not clear away the mess in my room, but I have changed it somewhat by replacing my jewelry and returning some of the garments to my closet. Now it looks as if a struggle had ensued, not as if robbers had been interrupted. I had a man repair the broken rear window downstairs. I am amazed at Howard's lack of imagination when he left that false clue, for he broke the window from inside.

I bought a new wig form from a store across the city, exactly like the one I have destroyed. This one does not evoke the illusion that it takes on the lines of my own face. Sometimes, when I see my real face in the mirror, it does become blank and featureless. This does not distress me now. I wait and the illusion vanishes and I see a new face. Its features are mine but the expression is quite different.

I repaired the small hole in the back of my wig and cut off a swatch of hair at the side, the same length as the strand that still protrudes its end from my pillow. I am wearing the wig now as I sit in my nightgown, waiting for my husband. His revolver is under my pillow, as he used to insist it should be. It has been shot once today. I have been told that bullets are identifiable, and Howard used a different gun, one with a silencer, when he shot my effigy.

I had to sacrifice two cushions and a rolled-up Persian rug in order to substitute a bullet from this gun for the one that bored through wig, holder, pillow and mattress, caromed off a baseboard and lay spent on the floor under my bed.

I shall wait until he crosses to the bed before I fire. The revolver has his prints as well as mine. The disordered room will show we struggled for the gun after he fired at my head, the bullet striking so close it sheared off a lock from the wig I had worn to bed.

I hear Howard's key in the front door. He is going into the kitchen first, probably to mix a steadying drink before coming up to discover, as he expects, his wife's body two days dead.

I have only time to slip this diary into its drawer where it will be safe until later, when I shall take it out and burn it. Then I shall get in bed and wait, listening for Howard's footsteps on the stairs.

. . . and Murder Makes FIVE

The slayings didn't seem like an outside job. But they were mysterious.

by MORRIS HERSHMAN

PETER VANNELL couldn't help feeling irritated as his eyes swept the dingy room and the sloppy tightlipped card players. The dust was so thick that it seemed to crunch under his feet whenever he took a step.

"This damn place is like a pigsty," he said suddenly. "Why the hell isn't it cleaned up once in a while?"

Nita Dooley looked up, frowning, then slapped her cards down on the table. Anger tightened her lips and accentuated the hardness of features that, despite their harshness, were sufficiently attractive to stir the pulse of most males.

"If you're so anxious to have this dump clean, do it yourself," she said bitterly. "I'm no cleaning

woman. Besides, we'll all be out of here in a week."

"The heat may not be off us in a week," Vannell snapped. "Killing that bank guard in Pennsville was a bad mistake. It makes for a mess."

Nita glanced at the man on her left. "You hear that, Luke? You're getting the needle! Bend down on your knees and say, 'I'm sorry, master.' "

"Knock it off," Luke Brice said absently, frowning down at the cards. "We rented us a house to hide out and we'll split a hundred grand when the heat dies down a little—unless somebody here is fixing to get away with all of it."

Brice always accused the others of wanting to get away with all of the loot, and generally gave them a keen look out of his hard brown eyes as soon as he said so.

"We're sitting pretty—in a mess of dirt," Vannell said. "In fact—" He broke off abruptly, a startled look coming into his eyes. "Did you hear anything up there? A squeak, maybe?"

Brice said instantly, "The dough!" and leapt to his feet. He turned just as swiftly and ran toward the carpeted stairs, getting to the bottom step almost before he had taken his gun out. "If anybody's up there, I'll kill the ugly son."

Vannell glanced back to Nita, who had transferred her attention to Big Russ, the fourth member of the team. Russ was busily trying to understand what she was saying, and wouldn't have done anything else just then. Vannell took it on himself to go with Brice. All of them had decided from the start that nobody was to be left alone on the top floor of this house.

Quickly Brice led the way into every room. The last one was the bedroom he had been using, and he stayed there a little longer than in any of the others. He suddenly bent over and pried up a board, then reached for the ten packages of money tied with a rubber band. He was able to scoop them up after only one try.

"Are you going to count the bank loot again?" Vannell couldn't help asking. "We all know we're rich. Even the yokels in town think we must be rolling in dough. When we rented this place, I heard a guy say something about rich city folks. Remember? I told you about it afterwards."

"The hell with them yokels," Brice said. "I'm going to do some counting on the loot again."

He sat down at the kneehole desk on one side, pulled out pencil and paper, and untied the first package. Brice never looked happier than when he was moistening one thumb or scribbling figures on the back of an envelope. Every so often, Vannell knew, Brice would go so far as to smile.

Luke didn't notice Vannell's irritation. Vannell glanced at the

unmade bed, the dirty windows, and the sprinkling of newspapers on the floor. The sight of a gash made by missing plaster on the ceiling forced Vannell to grit his teeth.

Nita Dooley stepped casually into the room before the counting job was half-finished, big Russ shambling along after her. Russ asked petulantly. "What's he up to?"

"Practicing how to count, again," Vannell said crisply. "Luke never knew numbers went up that high."

Brice put the pencil down unwillingly and shrugged his massive shoulders; the pleasant little chore was finished. "Fun's over, I guess," he said. "It couldn't last forever. It's all there, though. A hundred grand. Biggest bank haul we ever made."

"Do we have to hide it again?" Russ asked innocently.

"If you don't mind," Brice said with elaborate sarcasm. "Then we can all grab some shut-eye."

"Unless," Vannell couldn't help putting in, "the mattresses creak, as usual."

"We could stuff 'em with bills, if we wanted," Brice said, chuckling. "But nobody's touching a nickel of it till we bust up—except maybe to count it over. And don't any of you forget—*I* do the counting."

Vannell, who would be close by and could have heard a blob of tar falling on a feather when he was supposed to be in deep sleep, nodded. He was inclined to trust Luke Brice at everything but physical tidiness; the two of them had done some jobs together in the past.

PETER VANNELL woke up earlier than usual the next morning, alerted by heavy footsteps that were familiar to him. Nita's, for sure. Luke's girl friend was on her way to the kitchen to make some of that dishwater she called coffee along with soggy toast and eggs as hard-boiled as a pair of marshmallows.

Vannell heard her start to give a tremendous yawn, but it was suddenly cut off in the middle. It was unusual for her to cut short any part of the morning ritual when she came into the kitchen. Vannell sat up, then got to his feet and put on a bathrobe. His gun was in the right hand pocket before he reached the bottom of the stairs.

Nita Dooley lay stretched out on the kitchen floor Her throat had been cut with a breadknife.

One look told him that she was past help and another that there was nobody in sight. All he could do now was to tell Brice what had happened.

Luke's first words to him showed that his suspicions were very much alive. He said a little resentfully, "I been listening to you walk around downstairs. What the hell you been doing that for?"

"It's a shame you didn't watch, too, instead of just listening," Vannell snapped. "Come on down with me."

"Hold it." Brice got up and went into Russ' room. Vannell joined them in time to see the big guy knuckling sleep out of his eyes. Russ nodded when he finally got it clear that he had to come downstairs with Brice and Vannell. He didn't ask a single question, but followed loyally.

Brice swore at sight of the body, then looked sharply at Vannell. "Why did you do it, Pete?"

"I didn't, Luke. You know me better than that."

"Well, Sleeping Beauty over there sure didn't touch her." Brice's lips may have been stretched in a smile, but his fists were clenched and his eyes looked like flints. "Hell, I don't care if you did it, Pete, as long as you had a good reason."

"If I wanted to kill her," Vannell said honestly, "I'd do it outside, where nobody would have to clean up afterwards."

"Broads are a dime a dozen," Brice said, shrugging. "I can stop off in Cleveland and get me a fresh batch. That's no problem. All I want to know is why you put the blocks to Nita."

"I keep trying to tell you, Luke, that I didn't. I never touched her in my life." Vannell shuddered slightly at the notion of himself touching as untidy a creature as Luke's girl friend had been.

"And you figure I believe it?" Luke asked.

Vannell moved forward swiftly, pulling the .32 out of Brice's pocket before he could finish reaching for it. He slapped Brice instantly with the back of a hand, but drew away from the man as soon as he'd done that, wiping the back of his hand with a piece of kleenex.

"I'm sorry you did that," Brice said quietly.

"I'm sorry I had to," Vannell told him. "I'll play it straight, Luke. I don't know whether the job was done by you or Russ, or by some yokel on the outside who feels sure we've got the dough and is after it. If it's an outsider, he may try again. I'm not going to

take any more chances than I have to."

Luke Brice said grimly, "That goes triple for me."

"I'll be cooking for myself from now on. I'll take a hot-plate and food up to my room, and I'm keeping the food under lock and key."

"That goes for me, too," Brice said. "And I'll be carrying a gun on me all the time."

"You won't be the only one," Vannell said. "But I hope we'll both be pretty damn careful about using 'em."

Brice grunted, then turned to Russ. "Put Nita's body in the other room and cover her with something."

Vannell added, "And mop up the floor in the kitchen, afterwards."

Russ gave him a sullen look and picked up the body in his arms before walking slowly and heavily out of the room.

The day dragged on. Vannell spent most of it keeping busy by cleaning up one or two of the bigger rooms. Brice muttered and sulked till he thought of an excuse to count the hundred thousand dollars in the middle of the afternoon, then muttered and sulked again afterwards.

Russ lay on a couch, listening intently to a radio program of tin pan alley-style folk music. The bank robbery was mentioned on a newscast, but not as prominently as in the past. As soon as the radio items and descriptions were halted, they'd split up and leave here.

The three of them buried Nita in a blanket in the middle of a grove of trees late at night, and hurried back to the house.

Vannell insisted that he and Russ should push their beds into Brice's room later on, so that all three of them would be able to guard the money. Each bed was put in a corner, but not until Vannell swept the floor.

While Russ snored blissfully, Vannell could feel Luke's eyes on him. After he heard Brice curse at the first unimportant move he made, Vannell didn't even pretend to be sleeping. He sat up and kept his eyes open, knowing perfectly well that Brice was doing the same thing.

"Pete," Brice said when the first fingers of light stabbed through the window, "let's send Sleeping Beauty here downstairs to make coffee for us. We can all pour it out from the same pot."

"All right."

Brice woke Russ up. The big guy yawned and turned over, trying to get more sleep before realizing what it was that Luke wanted. Then, scratching himself luxuriously, he felt for his slippers with both feet, slowly put a bathrobe on and reminded himself out loud to take a gun with him.

Vannell said, "Russ, clean out the pot before you put water in."

Russ clumped out of there. Vannell heard him groping his way downstairs and turning the lights on while he cursed the daylight. When Vannell had finished his morning ablutions he called down, "All set, Russ?"

No answer. Startled by the silence downstairs and more than a little jumpy, Vannell headed for the staircase. He was halfway down it before remembering that he'd left Brice alone up there. But he was too upset to go back. The black bile rose up in him all over again as soon as he saw what had happened in the kitchen.

Russ lay on the floor close to the gas range where coffee was perking cheerfully. He had been attacked with a freshly-stained kitchen knife, which had been dropped next to him. His throat was cut from ear to ear. The gun he'd taken with him had not been fired and lay on the floor. His pockets had been turned inside out.

Back of him, he heard Brice saying sharply, "Well, Pete, that just about gives you away, don't it?" He was holding his .32 in one hand, pointing it unwaveringly at Vannell's heart.

"We're in a mess," Vannell said, trying to ignore the gun as he glanced at the open window. "Somebody on the outside is after the loot, Luke, and doesn't care who he has to kill in order to get it. You said something about a yokel from the nearest town—a yokel who guesses we're rich and wants the dough. We only play into his hands by not trusting each other."

"If there's somebody else, why don't he get the drop on us and finish it quick? Why knock us off one by one? It don't make sense."

"Maybe there's a reason we don't know. The pockets of Russ' bathrobe are inside out, as if somebody searched him. I don't remember if Nita's pockets were the same way."

"Do you mean that somebody was searching in such a small area for a hundred grand?" Brice asked harshly. "I know I didn't knock off either of them. I don't know if some other joker is around or not. But I know one person who is positively here and I'm going to fix him first. You follow that?"

"Don't be a damn fool," Vannell said. "The two of us have got to stick together. We can pack up and get out of here and go to a hotel someplace."

"And step right into the cops' arms, huh? Don't try to sell me more fairy tales, Pete. Just do what I say. Turn around, then throw your gun down on the floor and walk up to the bedroom. I'm not kidding."

Vannell turned, dropped the gun neatly into an oversized ashtray, and started to walk upstairs. He could hear Brice's steps far enough back of him so that he, Vannell, wouldn't be able to get closer.

"Now we'll see about the loot,"

Brice said when he walked into the bedroom. "I'll make sure you didn't latch on to any of it. Get it up from the floor and put it on my desk."

Vannell did it, taking the money from the hiding place covered by a loose floorboard.

every five-count. Vannell was perfectly still, trying to frame arguments that might change Brice's mind.

All he could think of, though, was that he felt cold. His toes were chilled through open-face slippers, and he wished he had put on an

Coming IN THE NEXT ISSUE

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

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SOMETHING LIKE A PELICAN

Perry Mason has become one of the truly great characters in present-day mystery fiction. But almost equally unique was Lester Leith, a prototype of the famed lawyer-detective whom Erle Stanley Gardner created a generation ago, and who appeared so often in the top-flight mystery magazines that his admirers are still legion. And here is Leith at his best.

"I'll count it," Brice said grimly. "If any of it is missing, I'm going to kill you slow. If it's all there, you get it quick—and easy."

He put the gun down close to him at one side of the scarred kneehole desk. He counted carefully, glancing up at Vannell after

extra pair of clean stockings. He told himself grimly that rigor mortis was setting in already.

"It's all there, the whole hundred grand," Brice said, picking up the gun.

"Just a minute, Luke. You've got to understand—"

Brice fired. Vannell reeled, staggered, reached for a solid object but clawed air instead. The second shot spun him around, and sent him crashing to the floor. Peter Vannell felt sticky moisture lapping around his hair. He also heard the next shot, but didn't feel anything else after its impact. He only knew he was dying amidst dirt.

Luke Brice looked regretfully down at Vannell's slumped body. He was sure going to miss Pete. An old woman when it came to cleanliness, maybe, but he'd always been dependable till this had started to happen. Brice kept telling himself what a shame it was all during the time he dragged Vannell's body into the room he wasn't going to use any more.

Brice's stomach rumbled. He shrugged, glanced upstairs towards his room where he kept a hotplate, then smiled and, glancing mechanically from left to right, walked into the kitchen.

He was on his way to the stove when he felt a knife against the back of his neck and a big hand pulling back his head. He couldn't scream or kick backwards, and it took him a long time to die . . .

THE MAN WHO was wearing dirty clothes threw the knife away and then took another one and cut two slices of rye bread for himself to make a tuna fish sandwich. A second breakfast. He gulped it down greedily.

This was a swell house, the best one so close to town. Ever since he'd found the key to the kitchen he'd been sneaking in for late suppers or breakfast when the place was rented. He'd never have bothered these people, but they kept interrupting him at breakfast—sneaking up on him like he was some sort of a criminal. He'd been fixing to hurt that second fellow when the third had hustled inside, carrying a gun; and he'd had to scrunch down in back of the icebox in a hurry.

He was known to the people in town as The Dummy, the one who wasn't as smart as the rest of 'em. But he was really a whole lot smarter. A whole lot and he'd never had any doubt of it.

He stopped over the body of the man he'd just killed, his huge hands turning the pockets inside out. The slain man's wallet contained ten old dollar bills. Ten of them. He counted them a few times. He hadn't got any money at all from other people in this house whom he had hurt. But this one made up for it.

Oh, the people in town had been absolutely right about one thing. They had kept saying that the folks who'd rented this place were rolling in money, were absolutely *filthy* with it. And here was ten dollars. *Ten dollars*. Why to a man like him, ten dollars was as good as a fortune. The Dummy chuckled.

(Continued from Other Side)

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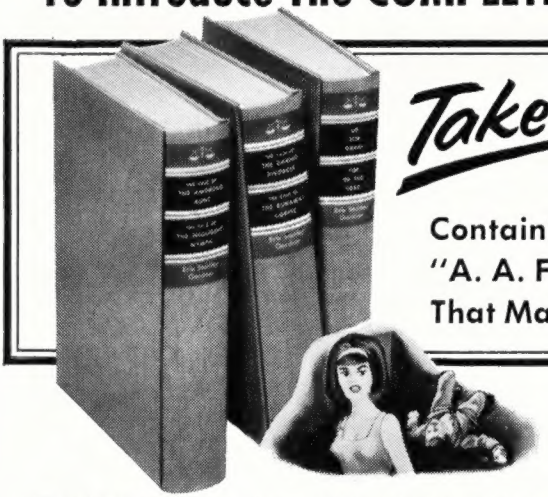

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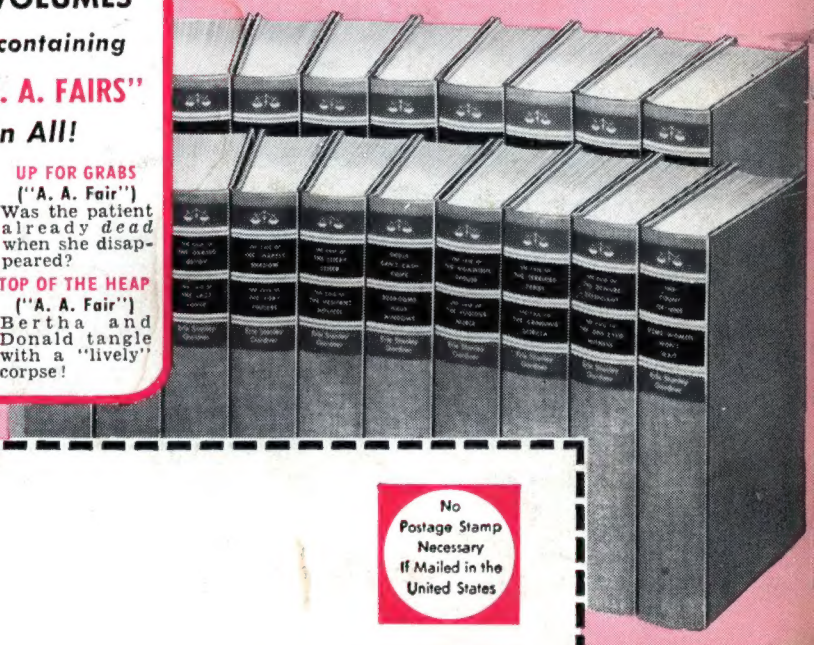

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